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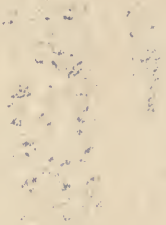

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WHERE THE PAVEMENT ENDS

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By

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WHERE THE PAVEMENT ENDS

THE FOURTH MAN

THE raft might have been taken for a swath of cut sedge or a drifting tangle of roots as it slid out of the shadowy river mouth at dawn and dipped into the first ground-swell. But while the sky brightened and the breeze came fresh offshore it picked a way among shoals and swampy islets with purpose and direction, and when at last the sun leaped up and cleared his bright eye of the morning mist it had passed the wide entrance to the bay and stood to open sea.

It was a curious craft for such a venture, of a type that survives here and there in the obscure corners of the world. The coracle maker would have scorned it. The first navigating pithecanthrope built nearly as well with his log and bush. A mat of pandanus leaves served for its sail and a paddle of niaouli wood for its helm. But it had a single point of real seaworthiness. Its twin floats, paired as a catamaran, were woven of reed bundles and bamboo sticks upon triple rows of bladders. It was light as a bladder itself, elastic, fit to ride any weather. One other quality this raft possessed which recommended it beyond all comfort and all safety to its present crew. It was very nearly invisible. They had only to unstep its mast and lie flat in the cup of its soggy platform and they could not be spied half a mile away.

Four men occupied the raft. Three of them were white. Their bodies had been scored with brambles and blackened with dried blood, and on wrist and ankle they bore the dark and wrinkled stain of the gyves. The hair upon them was long and matted. They wore only the rags of blue canvas uniforms. But they were whites, members of the superior race—members of a highly superior race according to those philosophers who rate the criminal aberration as a form of genius.

The fourth was the man who had built the raft and was now sailing it. There was nothing superior about him. His skin was a layer of soot. His prognathous jaw carried out the angle of a low forehead. No line of beauty redeemed his lean limbs and knobby joints. Nature had set upon him her plainest stamp of inferiority, and his only attempts to relieve it were the twist of bark about his middle and the prong of pig ivory through the cartilage of his nose. Altogether a very ordinary specimen of one of the lowest branches of the human family—the Canaques of New Caledonia.

The three whites sat together well forward, and so they had sat in silence for hours. But at sunrise, as if some spell had been raised by the clang of that great copper gong in the east, they stirred and breathed deep of the salt air and looked at one another with hope in their haggard faces, and then back toward the land which was now no more than a grey-green smudge behind them. . . . "Friends," said the eldest, whose temples were bound with a scrap of crimson scarf, "Friends—the thing is done."

With a gesture like conjuring he produced from the breast of his tattered blouse three cigarettes, fresh and round, and offered them.

" Nippers ! " cried the one at his right. " True nippers—name of a little good man ! And here ? Doctor, I always said you were a marvel. See if they be not new from the box ! "

Dr. Dubosc smiled. Those who had known him in very different circumstances about the boulevards, the lobbies, the clubs, would have known him again and in spite of all disfigurement by that smile. And here, at the bottom of the earth, it had set him still apart in the prisons, the cobalt mines, the chain gangs of a community not much given to mirth. Many a crowded lecture hall at Montpellier had seen him touch some intellectual firework with just such a twinkle behind his bristly grey brows, with just such a thin curl of lip.

" By way of celebration," he explained. " Consider. There are seventy-five evasions from Numea every six months, of which not more than one succeeds. I had the figures myself from Dr. Pierre at the infirmary. He is not much of a physician, but a very honest fellow. Could anybody win on that percentage without dissipating ? I ask you."

" Therefore you prepared for this ? "

" It is now three weeks since I bribed the night guard to get these same nippers."

The other regarded him with admiration. Sentiment came readily upon this beardless face, tender and languid, but overdrawn, with eyes too large and soft and oval too long. It was one of those faces familiar enough to the police which might serve as model for an angel were it not associated with some revolting piece of devilry. Fenayrou himself had been condemned " to perpetuity " as an incorrigible.

" Is not our doctor a wonder ? " he inquired as he handed a cigarette along to the third white man. " He

thinks of everything. You should be ashamed to grumble. See—we are free, after all. Free!"

The third was a gross, pock-marked man with hairless lids known sometimes as Niniche, Trois Huit, Le Tordeur, but chiefly among copains as Perroquet—a name derived perhaps from his beaked nose, or from some perception of his jailbird character. He was a garrotter by profession, accustomed to rely upon his fists only for the exchange of amenities. Dubosc might indulge a fancy and Fenayrou seek to carry it as a pose, but The Parrot remained a gentleman of strictly serious turn. There is perhaps a tribute to the practical spirit of penal administration in the fact that while Dubosc was the most dangerous of these three and Fenayrou the most depraved, Perroquet was the one with the official reputation, whose escape would be signalled first among the "Wanted." He accepted the cigarette because he was glad to get it, but he said nothing until Dubosc passed a tin box of matches and the first gulp of picadura filled his lungs. . . .

"Wait till you've got your two feet on a pave, my boy. That will be the time to talk of freedom. What? Suppose there came a storm."

"It is not the season of storms," observed Dubosc.

But The Parrot's word had given them a check. Such spirits as these, to whom the land had been a horror, would be slow to feel the terror of the sea. Back there they had left the festering limbo of a convict colony, oblivion. Out here they had reached the rosy threshold of the big round world again. They were men raised from the dead, charged with all the furious appetites of lost years, with the savour of life, strong and sweet on their lips. And yet they paused and looked about in quickened perception, with the

clutch at the throat that takes the landsman on big waters. The spaces were so wide and empty. The voices in their ears were so strange and murmurous. There was a threat in each wave that came from the depths, a sinister vibration. None of them knew the sea. None knew its ways, what tricks it might play, what traps it might spread—more deadly than those of the jungle.

The raft was running now before a brisk chop with alternate spring and wallow, while the froth bubbled in over the prow and ran down among them as they sat. "Where is that cursed ship that was to meet us here?" demanded Fenayrou.

"It will meet us right enough." Dubosc spoke carelessly, though behind the brown wisp of his cigarette he had been searching the outer horizon with keen glance. "This is the day, as agreed. We will be picked up off the mouth of the river."

"You say," growled Perroquet. "But where is any river now? Or any mouth? Sacred name, this wind will blow us to China if we keep on."

"We dare not lie in any closer. There is a Government launch at Torrien. Also the traders go armed hereabouts, ready for chaps like us. And don't imagine that the native trackers have given us up. They are likely to be following still in their proas."

"So far!"

Fenayrou laughed, for The Parrot's dread of their savage enemies had a morbid tinge.

"Take care, Perroquet. They will eat you yet."

"Is it true?" demanded the other, appealing to Dubosc. "I have heard it is even permitted these devils to keep all runaways they can capture—Name of God!—to fatten on."

" An idle tale," smiled Dubosc. " They prefer th reward. But one hears of convicts being badly mauled There was a forester who made a break from Baie d Sud and came back lacking an arm. Certainly thes people have not lost the habit of cannibalism."

" Piecemeal," chuckled Fenayrou. " They will onl sample you, Perroquet. Let them make a stew of you brains. You would miss nothing."

But The Parrot swore.

" Name of a name—what brutes ! " he said, and b a gesture recalled the presence of that fourth ma who was of their party and yet so completely separ ated from them that they had almost forgotten him

The Canaque was steering the raft. He sat crouche at the stern, his body glistening like varnished ebon with spray. He held the steering paddle, immobile a an image, his eyes fixed upon the course ahead. Ther was no trace of expression on his face, no hint of wha he thought or felt or whether he thought or felt any thing. He seemed not even aware of their regard, an each one of them experienced somehow that twing of uneasiness with which the white confronts hi brother of colour—this enigma brown or yellow o black he is fated never wholly to understand or t fathom. . . .

" It occurs to me," said Fenayrou, in a pause, " tha our friend here who looks like a shiny boot is able t steer us God knows where. Perhaps to claim the re ward."

" Reassure yourself," answered Dubosc. " He steer by my order. Besides, it is a simple creature—a infant, truly, incapable of any but the most primitiv reasoning."

"Is he incapable of treachery?"

"Of any that would deceive us. Also, he is bound by his duty. I made my bargain with his chief, up the river, and this one is sent to deliver us on board our ship. It is the only interest he has in us."

"And he will do it?"

"He will do it. Such is the nature of the native."

"I am glad you feel so," returned Fenayrou, adjusting himself indolently among the drier reeds and nursing the last of his cigarette. "For my part I wouldn't trust a figurehead like that for two sous. Mazette! What a monkey face!"

"Brute!" repeated Perroquet, and this man, sprung from some vile river-front slum of Argenteuil, whose home had been the dock pilings, the grog shop, and the jail, even this man viewed the black Canaque from an immeasurable distance with the look of hatred and contempt. . . .

Under the heat of the day the two younger convicts lapsed presently into dozing. But Dubosc did not doze. His tormented soul peered out behind its mask as he stood to sweep the skyline again under shaded hand. His theory had been so precise, the fact was so different. He had counted absolutely on meeting the ship—some small schooner, one of those flitting, half-piratical traders of the copra islands that can be hired like cabs in a dark street for any questionable enterprise. Now there was no ship, and here was no cross-roads where one might sit and wait. Such a craft as the catamaran could not be made to lie to.

The doctor foresaw ugly complications for which he had prepared and whereof he must bear the burden. The escape had been his own conception, directed by him from the start. He had picked his companions

deliberately from the whole forced labour squad, Perroquet for his great strength, Fenayrou as a ready echo. He had made it plain since their first dash from the mine, during their skirmish with the military guards, their subsequent wanderings in the brush with bloodhounds and trackers on the trail—through every crisis—that he alone should be the leader.

For the others, they had understood well enough which of their number was the chief beneficiary. Those mysterious friends on the outside that were reaching half around the world to further their release had never heard of such individuals as Fenayrou and The Parrot. Dubosc was the man who had pulled the wires: that brilliant physician whose conviction for murder had followed so sensationally, so scandalously, upon his sweep of academic and social honours. There would be clacking tongues in many a Parisian salon, and white faces in some, when news should come of his escape. Ah, yes, for example, they knew the highflyer of the band, and they submitted—so long as he led them to victory. They submitted, while reserving a depth of jealousy, the inevitable remnant of caste persisting still in this democracy of stripes and shame.

By the middle of the afternoon the doctor had taken certain necessary measures.

"Ho!" said Fenayrou sleepily. "Behold our colours at the masthead. What is that for, comrade?"

The sail had been lowered and in its place streamed the scrap of crimson scarf that had served Dubosc as a turban.

"To help them sight us when the ship comes."

"What wisdom!" cried Fenayrou. "Always he thinks of everything, our doctor: everything——"

He stopped with the phrase on his lips, and his hand

outstretched toward the centre of the platform. Here, in a damp depression among the weeds, had lain the wicker-covered bottle of green glass in which they carried their water. It was gone.

"Where is that flask?" he demanded. "The sun has grilled me like a bone."

"You will have to grill some more," said Dubosc grimly. "This crew is put on rations."

Fenayrou stared at him wide-eyed, and from the shadow of a folded mat The Parrot thrust his purpled face. "What do you sing me there? Where is that water?"

"I have it," said Dubosc.

They saw, in fact, that he held the flask between his knees, along with their single packet of food in its wrapping of coco-nut husk.

"I want a drink," challenged Perroquet.

"Reflect a little. We must guard our supplies like reasonable men. One does not know how long we may be floating here. . . ."

Fell a silence among them, heavy and strained, in which they heard only the squeaking of frail basket-work as their raft laboured in the wash. Slow as was their progress, they were being pushed steadily outward and onward, and the last cliffs of New Caledonia were no longer even a smudge in the west, but only a hazy line. And still they had seen no moving thing upon the great round breast of the sea that gleamed in its corselet of brass plates under a brazen sun. "So that is the way you talk now?" began The Parrot, half choking. "You do not know how long? But you were sure enough when we started."

"I am still sure," returned Dubosc. "The ship will come. Only she cannot stay for us in one spot.

She will be cruising to and fro until she intercepts us. We must wait."

"Ah, good! We must wait. And in the meantime, what? Fry here in the sacred heat with our tongues hanging out while you deal us drop by drop—hein?"

"Perhaps."

"But no!" The garrotter clenched his hands. "Blood of God, there is no man big enough to feed me with a spoon!"

Fenayrou's chuckle came pat, as it had more than once, and Dubosc shrugged.

"You laugh!" cried Perroquet, turning in fury. "But how about this lascar of a captain that lets us put to sea unprovided? What? He thinks of everything, does he? He thinks of everything! . . . Sacred farceur—let me hear you laugh again!"

Somehow Fenayrou was not so minded.

"And now he bids us be reasonable," concluded The Parrot. "Tell that to the devils in hell. You and your cigarettes, too. Bah—comedian!"

"It is true," muttered Fenayrou, frowning. "A bad piece of work for a captain of runaways."

But the doctor faced mutiny with his thin smile.

"All this alters nothing. Unless we would die very speedily, we must guard our water."

"By whose fault?"

"Mine," acknowledged the doctor. "I admit it. What then? We can't turn back. Here we are. Here we must stay. We can only do our best with what we have."

"I want a drink," repeated The Parrot, whose throat was afire since he had been denied.

"You can claim your share, of course. But take

warning of one thing. After it is gone do not think to sponge on us—on Fenayrou and me."

"He would be capable of it, the pig!" exclaimed Fenayrou, to whom this thrust had been directed. "I know him. See here, my old, the doctor is right. Fair for one, fair for all."

"I want a drink."

Dubosc removed the wooden plug from the flask.

"Very well," he said quietly.

With the delicacy that lent something of legerdemain to all his gestures, he took out a small canvas wallet, the crude equivalent of the professional black bag, from which he drew a thimble. Meticulously he poured a brimming measure, and Fenayrou gave a shout at the grumbler's fallen jaw as he accepted that tiny cup between his big fingers. Dubosc served Fenayrou and himself with the same amount before he recorked the bottle.

"In this manner we should have enough to last us three days—maybe more—with equal shares among the three of us. . . ."

Such was his summing of the demonstration, and it passed without comment, as a matter of course in the premises, that he should count as he did—ignoring that other who sat alone at the stern of the raft, the black Canaque, the fourth man.

Perroquet had been outmanœuvred, but he listened sullenly while for the hundredth time Dubosc recited his easy and definite plan for their rescue, as arranged with his secret correspondents.

"That sounds very well," observed The Parrot, at last. "But what if these jokers only mock themselves of you? What if they have counted it good riddance to let you rot here? And us? Sacred name,

that would be a famous jest ! To let us wait for a ship and they have no ship ! "

" Perhaps the doctor knows better than we how sure a source he counts upon," suggested Fenayrou slyly.

" That is so," said Dubosc, with great good humour. " My faith, it would not be well for them to fail me. Figure to yourselves that there is a safety vault in Paris full of papers to be opened at my death. Certain friends of mine could hardly afford to have some little confessions published that would be found there. . . . Such a tale as this, for instance——"

And to amuse them he told an indecent anecdote of high life, true or fictitious, it mattered nothing, so he could make Fenayrou's eyes glitter and The Parrot growl in wonder. Therein lay his means of ascendancy over such men, the knack of eloquence and vision. Harried, worn, oppressed by fears that he could sense so much more sharply than they, he must expend himself now in vulgar marvels to distract these ruder minds. He succeeded so far that when the wind fell at sunset they were almost cheerful, ready to believe that the morning would bring relief. They dined on dry biscuit and another thimbleful of water apiece and took watch by amiable agreement. And through that long, clear night of stars, whenever the one of the three who kept between his comrades chanced to look aft, he could see the vague blot of another figure—the naked Canaque, who slumbered there apart. . . .

It was an evil dawning. Fenayrou, on the morning trick, was aroused by a foot as hard as a hoof, and started up at Perroquet's wrathful face, with the doctor's graver glance behind.

" Idler ! Good-for-nothing ! Will you wake at least

before I smash your ribs ? Name of God, here is a way to stand watch ! "

" Keep off ? " cried Fenayrou wildly. " Keep off. Don't touch me ! "

" Eh, and why not, fool ? Do you know that the ship could have missed us ? A ship could have passed us a dozen times while you slept ? "

" Bourrique ! "

" Vache ! "

They spat the insults of the prison while Perroquet knotted his great fist over the other, who crouched away catlike, his mobile mouth twisted to a snarl. Dubosc stood aside in watchful calculation until against the angry red sunrise in which they floated there flashed the naked red gleam of steel. Then he stepped between.

" Enough. Fenayrou, put up that knife."

" The dog kicked me ! "

" You were at fault," said Dubosc sternly. " Perroquet ! "

" Are we all to die that he may sleep ? " stormed The Parrot.

" The harm is done. Listen now, both of you. Things are bad enough already. We may need all our energies. Look about."

They looked and saw the far, round horizon and the empty desert of the sea and their own long shadows that slipped slowly before them over its smooth, slow heaving, and nothing else. The land had sunk away from them in the night—some one of the chance currents that sweep among the islands had drawn them none could say where or how far. The trap had been sprung. " Good God, how lonely it is ! " breathed Fenayrou in a hush.

No more was said. They dropped their quarrel. Silently they shared their rations as before, made shift to eat something with their few drops of water, and sat down to pit themselves one against another in the vital struggle that each could feel was coming—a sort of tacit test of endurance.

A calm had fallen, as it does between trades in this flawed belt, an absolute calm. The air hung weighted. The sea showed no faintest crinkle, only the maddening, unresting heave and fall in polished undulations on which the lances of the sun broke and drove in under their eyelids as white, hot splinters ; a savage sun that kindled upon them with the power of a burning glass, that sucked the moisture from poor human bits of jelly and sent them crawling to the shelter of their mats and brought them out again, gasping, to shrivel anew. The water, the world of water, seemed sleek and thick as oil. They came to loathe it and the rotting smell of it, and when the doctor made them dip themselves overside they found little comfort. It was warm, sluggish, slimed. But a curious thing resulted. . . .

While they clung along the edge of the raft they all faced inboard, and there sat the black Canaque. He did not join them. He did not glance at them. He sat hunkered on his heels in the way of the native, with arms hugging his knees. He stayed in his place at the stern, motionless under that shattering sun, gazing out into vacancy. Whenever they raised their eyes they saw him. He was the only thing to see.

" Here is one who appears to enjoy himself quite well," remarked Dubosc.

" I was thinking so myself," said Fenayrou.

" The animal ! " rumbled Perroquet.

They observed him, and for the first time with direct

interest, with thought of him as a fellow being—with the beginning of envy.

"He does not seem to suffer."

"What is going on in his brain? What does he dream of there? One would say he despises us."

"The beast!"

"Perhaps he is waiting for us to die," suggested Fenayrou with a harsh chuckle. "Perhaps he is waiting for the reward. He would not starve on the way home, at least. And he could deliver us—piecemeal."

They studied him.

"How does he do it, doctor? Has he no feeling?"

"I have been wondering," said Dubosc. "It may be that his fibres are tougher—his nerves."

"Yet we have had water and he none."

"But look at his skin, fresh and moist."

"And his belly, fat as a football!"

The Parrot hauled himself aboard.

"Don't tell me this black beast knows thirst!" he cried with a strange excitement. "Is there any way he could steal our supplies?"

"Certainly not."

"Then, name of a dog, what if he has supplies of his own hidden about?"

The same monstrous notion struck them all, and the others swarmed to help. They knocked the black aside. They searched the platform where he had sat, burrowing among the rushes, seeking some secret cache, another bottle or a gourd. They found nothing.

"We were mistaken," said Dubosc.

But Perroquet had a different expression for disappointment. He turned on the Canaque and caught him by the kinky mop of the hair and proceeded to give him what is known as gruel in the cobalt mines.

This was a little speciality of The Parrot's. He paused only when he himself was breathless and exhausted and threw the limp, unresisting body from him.

" There, lump of dirt ! That will teach you. Maybe you're not so chipper now, my boy—hein ? Not quite so satisfied with your luck. Pig ! That will make you feel. . . ."

It was a ludicrous, a wanton, a witless thing. But the others said nothing. The learned Dubosc made no protest. Fenayrou had none of his usual jests at the garrotter's stupidity. They looked on as at the satisfaction of a common grudge. The white trampled the black with or without cause, and that was natural. And the black crept away into his place with his hurts and his wrongs and made no sign and struck no blow. And that was natural too.

The sun declined into a blazing furnace whereof the gates stood wide, and they prayed to hasten it and cursed because it hung enchanted. But when it was gone their blistered bodies still held the heat like things incandescent. The night closed down over them like a purple bow, glazed and impermeable. They would have divided the watches again, though none of them thought of sleep, but Fenayrou made a discovery.

" Idiots ! " he rasped. " Why should we look and look ? A whole navy of ships cannot help us now. If we are becalmed, why so are they ! "

The Parrot was singularly put out.

" Is this true ? " he asked Dubosc.

" Yes, we must hope for a breeze first."

" Then, name of God, why didn't you tell us so ? Why did you keep on playing out the farce ? "

He pondered it for a time. " See here," he said. " You are wise, eh ? You are very wise. You know

things we do not and you keep them to yourself." He leaned forward to peer into the doctor's face. "Very good. But if you think you're going to use that cursed smartness to get the best of us in any way—see here, my zig, I pull your gullet out like the string of an orange. . . . Like that. What?"

Fenayrou gave a nervous giggle and Dubosc shrugged, but it was perhaps about this time that he began to regret his intervention in the knife play.

For there was no breeze and there was no ship.

By the third morning each had sunk within himself, away from the rest. The doctor was lost in a profound depression, Perroquet in dark suspicion, and Fenayrou in bodily suffering, which he supported ill. Only two effective ties still bound their confederacy. One was the flask which Dubose had slung at his side by a strip of the wickerwork. Every move he made with it, every drop he poured, was followed by burning eyes. And he knew, and he had no advantage of them in knowing, that the will to live was working its relentless formula aboard that raft. Under his careful saving there still remained nearly half of their original store.

The other bond, as it had come to be by strange mutation, was the presence of the black Canaque.

There was no forgetting the fourth man now, no overlooking of him. He loomed upon their consciousness, more formidable, more mysterious, more exasperating with every hour. Their own powers were ebbing. The naked savage had yet to give the slightest sign of complaint or weakness.

During the night he had stretched himself out on the platform as before, and after a time he had slept. Through the hours of darkness and silence while each

of the whites wrestled with despair, this black man had slept as placidly as a child, with easy, regular breathing. Since then he had resumed his place aft. And so he remained, unchanged, a fixed fact and a growing wonder.

The brutal rage of Perroquet, in which he had vented his distorted hate of the native, had been followed by superstitious doubts.

"Doctor," he said at last, in awed huskiness, "is this a man or a fiend?"

"It is a man."

"A miracle," put in Fenayrou.

But the doctor lifted a finger in a way his pupils would have remembered:

"It is a man," he repeated, "and a very poor and wretched example of a man. You will find no lower type anywhere. Observe his cranial angle, the high ears, the heavy bones of his skull. He is scarcely above the ape. There are educated apes more intelligent."

"Ah! Then what?"

"He has a secret," said the doctor.

That was a word to transfix them.

"A secret! But we see him—every move he makes, every instant. What chance for a secret?"

The doctor rather forgot his audience, betrayed by chagrin and bitterness.

"How pitiful!" he mused. "Here are we three—children of the century, products of civilization—I fancy none would deny that, at least. And here is this man who belongs before the Stone Age. In a set trial of fitness, of wits, of resource, is he to win? Pitiful!"

"What kind of secret!" demanded Perroquet fuming.

"I cannot say," admitted Dubosc, with a baffled

gesture. " Possibly some method of breathing, some peculiar posture that operates to cheat the sensations of the body. Such things are known among primitive peoples—known and carefully guarded—like the properties of certain drugs, the uses of hypnotism and complex natural laws. Then, again, it may be psychologic—a mental attitude persistently held. Who knows? . . .

" To ask him? Useless. He will not tell. Why should he? We scorn him. We give him no share with us. We abuse him. He simply falls back on his own expedients. He simply remains inscrutable—as he has always been and will always be. He never tells those innermost secrets. They are the means by which he has survived from the depth of time, by which he may yet survive when all our wisdom is dust."

" I know several very excellent ways of learning secrets," said Fenayrou as he passed his dry tongue over his lips. " Shall I begin? "

Dubosc came back with a start and looked at him.

" It would be useless. He could stand any torture you could invent. No, that is not the way."

" Listen to mine," said Perroquet, with sudden violence. " Me, I am wearied of the gab. You say he is a man? Very well. If he is a man, he must have blood in his veins. That would be, anyway, good to drink."

" No," returned Dubosc. " It would be hot. Also it would be salt. For food—perhaps. But we do not need food."

" Kill the animal, then, and throw him over! "

" We gain nothing."

" Well, sacred name, what do you want? "

"To beat him!" cried the doctor, curiously agitated. "To beat him at the game—that's what I want! For our own sakes, for our racial pride, we must, we must. To outlast him, to prove ourselves his masters. By better brain, by better organization and control. Watch him, watch him, friends—that we may ensnare him, that we may detect and defeat him in the end!"

But the doctor was miles beyond them.

"Watch?" growled The Parrot. "I believe you, old windbag. It is all one watch. I sleep no more and leave any man alone with that bottle."

To this the issue finally sharpened. Such craving among such men could not be stayed much longer by driblets. They watched. They watched the Canaque. They watched each other. And they watched the falling level in their flask—until the tension gave.

Another dawn upon the same dead calm, rising like a conflagration through the puddled air, cloudless, hopeless! Another day of blinding, slow-drawn agony to meet. And Dubosc announced that their allowance must be cut to half a thimbleful.

There remained perhaps a quarter of a litre—a miserable reprieve of bare life among the three of them, but one good swallow for a yearning throat.

At sight of the bottle, at the tinkle of its limpid contents, so cool and silvery green inside the glass, Fenayrou's nerve snapped. . . .

"More!" he begged, with pleading hands. "I die. More!"

When the doctor refused him he grovelled among the reeds, then rose suddenly to his knees and tossed his arms abroad with a hoarse cry:

"A ship! A ship!"

The others spun about. They saw the thin unbroken ring of this greater and more terrible prison to which they had exchanged : and that was all they saw, though they stared and stared. They turned back to Fenayrou and found him in the act of tilting the bottle. A cunning slash of his knife had loosed it from its sling at the doctor's side. . . . Even now he was sucking at the mouth, spilling the precious liquid—

With the one sweep Perroquet caught up their paddle and flattened him, crushed him.

Springing across the prostrate man, Dubosc snatched the flask upright and put the width of the raft between himself and the big garrotter who stood wide-legged, his bloodshot eyes alight, rumbling in his chest.

" There is no ship," said The Parrot. " There will be no ship. We are done. Because of you and your rotten promises that brought us here—doctor, liar, ass ! "

Dubosc stood firm.

" Come a step nearer and I break bottle and all over your head."

They stood regarding each other, and Perroquet's brows gathered in a slow effort of thought.

" Consider," urged Dubosc with his quaint touch of pedantry. " Why should you and I fight ? We are rational men. We can see this trouble through and win yet. Such weather cannot last for ever. Besides, here are only two of us to divide the water now."

" That is true," nodded The Parrot. " That is true, isn't it ? Fenayrou kindly leaves us his share. An inheritance—what ? A famous idea. I'll take mine now."

Dubosc probed him keenly.

" My share, at once, if you please," insisted Perroquet, with heavy docility. " Afterward, we shall see. Afterward."

The doctor smiled his grim and wan little smile.

" So be it."

Without relinquishing the flask he brought out his canvas wallet once more—that wallet which replaced the professional black bag—and rolled out the thimble by some swift sleight of his flexible fingers while he held Perroquet's glance with his own.

" I will measure it for you."

He poured the thimbleful and handed it over quickly, and when Perroquet had tossed it off he filled again and again.

" Four—five," he counted. " That is enough."

But The Parrot's big grip closed quietly around his wrist at the last offering and pinioned him and held him helpless.

" No, it is not enough. Now I will take the rest. Ha, wise man ! Have I fooled you at last ? "

There was no chance to struggle, and Dubosc did not try, only stayed smiling up at him, waiting.

Perroquet took the bottle.

" The best man wins," he remarked. " Eh, my zig ? A bright notion—of yours. The—best——"

His lips moved, but no sound issued. A look of the most intense surprise spread upon his round face. He stood swaying a moment, and collapsed like a huge hinged toy when the string is cut.

Dubosc stooped and caught the bottle again, looking down at his big adversary, who sprawled in brief convulsion and lay still, a bluish scum oozing between his teeth. . . .

"Yes, the best man wins," repeated the doctor, and laughed as he in turn raised the flask for a draft.

"The best wins!" echoed a voice in his ear.

Fenayrou, writhing up and striking like a wounded snake, drove the knife home between his shoulders.

The bottle fell and rolled to the middle of the platform, and there, while each strove vainly to reach it, it poured out its treasure in a tiny stream that trickled away and was lost.

It may have been minutes or hours later—for time has no count in emptiness—when next a sound proceeded from that frail slip of a raft, hung like a mote between sea and sky. It was a phrase of song, a wandering strain in half tones and fluted accidentals, not unmelodious. The black Canaque was singing. He sang without emotion or effort, quite casually and softly to himself. So he might sing by his forest hut to ease some hour of idleness. Clasping his knees and gazing out into space, untroubled, unmoved, enigmatic to the end, he sang—he sang.

And after all, the ship came.

She came in a manner befitting the sauciest little tops'l schooner between Nukahiva and the Pelews—as her owner often averred and none but the envious denied—in a manner worthy, too, of that able Captain Jean Guibert, the merriest little scamp that ever cleaned a pearl bank or snapped a cargo of labour from a scowling coast. Before the first whiff out of the west came the *Petite Susanne*, curtsying and skipping along with a flash of white frill by her forefoot, and brought up startled and stood shaking her skirts and keeping herself quite daintily to windward.

"And 'ere they are sure enough, by dam'!" said the polyglot Captain Jean in the language of commerce and profanity. "Zose passengers for us, hey? They been here all the time, not ten mile off—I bet you, Marteau. Ain't it 'ell? What you zink, my gar?"

His second, a tall and excessively bony individual of gloomy outlook, handed back the glasses.

"More bad luck. I never approved of this job. And now—see?—we have had our voyage for nothing. What misfortune!"

"Marteau, if that good Saint Pierre gives you some day a gold 'arp still you would holler bad luck—bad job!" retorted Captain Jean. "Do I 'ire you to stand zere and cry about ze luck? Get a boat over, and quicker zan zat!"

M. Marteau aroused himself sufficiently to take command of the boat's crew that presently dropped away to investigate. . . .

"It is even as I thought," he called up from the quarter when he returned with his report. "I told you how it would be, Captain Jean."

"Hey?" cried the captain, bouncing at the rail. "Have you got zose passengers yet, *enfant de salaud*?"

"I have not," said Marteau in the tone of lugubrious triumph. There was nothing in the world that could have pleased him quite so much as this chance to prove Captain Jean the loser on a venture. "We are too late. Bad luck, bad luck—that calm. What misfortune! They are all dead!"

"Will you mind your business?" shouted the skipper.

"But still, the gentlemen are dead——"

"What is zat to me? All ze better, they will cost nozing to feed."

"But how——"

"Hogsheads, my gar," said Captain Jean paternally. "Zose hogsheads in the afterhold. Fill them nicely with brine, and zere we are!" And, having drawn all possible satisfaction from the other's amazement, he sprang the nub of his joke with a grin. "Ze gentlemen's passage is all paid, Marteau. Before we left Sydney, Marteau. I contrac' to bring back three escape' convicts, and so by 'ell I do—in pickle! And now if you'll kindly get zose passengers aboard like I said an' bozzer less about ze goddam luck, I be much oblige'. Also, zere is no green on my eye, Marteau, and you can dam' well smoke it!"

Marteau recovered himself with difficulty in time to recall another trifling detail. "There is a fourth man on board that raft, Captain Jean. He is a Canaque—still alive. What shall we do with him?"

"A Canaque?" snapped Captain Jean. "A Canaque! I have no word in my contrac' about any Canaque. . . . Leave him zere. . . . He is only a dam' nigger. He'll do well enough where he is."

And Captain Jean was right, perfectly right, for while the *Petite Susanne* was taking aboard her grisly cargo the wind freshened from the west, and just about the time she was shaping away for Australia the "dam' nigger" spread his own sail of pandanus leaves and twirled his own helm of niaouli wood and headed the catamaran eastward, back toward New Caledonia.

Feeling somewhat dry after his exertion, he plucked at random from the platform a hollow reed with a sharp end, and, stretching himself at full length in his accustomed place, at the stern, he thrust the reed down

into one of the bladders underneath and drank his fill of sweet water. . . .

He had a dozen such storage bladders remaining, built into the floats at intervals above the water line—quite enough to last him safely home again.

THE LOST GOD

PROPHETS have cried out in print, no man regarding, and saints have been known to write their autobiographies, and even angels are credited now and then with revealing most curious matters in language quite plain and ungrammatical. But I have seen the diary of an authentic god who once went to and fro on the earth and in the waters underneath.

His record is the Book of Jim Albro, and he made it at Barange Bay, which is Papua, which is the end of the back of beyond and a bit farther yet: the great, dark, and smiling land that no white man has ever yet gripped as a conqueror, where anything can happen that you would care to believe and many things that you never would. He neglected to copyright it himself. The chances of his returning to claim it are apparently remote. And Jeckol says that fiction is stranger than truth anyhow, and pays better. So I shall feel quite safe in making free of that remarkable work, just as Jim Albro set it down with a leaden bullet on some strips of bark and left it for those who came after to find. . . .

In his very blackest hour Jim Albro must have known that somebody would come after him, some time. Somebody always did come after him, no matter how far and to what desperate chance his trail might lead. He was that kind. All his days he never lacked the friend to hunt him up and to pack him home when he

was helpless, to pay his bills or to bail him out at need. One of those irresistible rascals born to a soft place near the world's heart whose worst follies serve only to endear them, whose wildest errors are accepted as the manifestation of an engaging caprice, while they go on serenely drawing blank cheques against destiny!

It is odd that he should have had to settle up in the end unaided, cut off from all help, completely isolated —and yet with the savour of popular admiration still rising about him, amid the continued applause of a multitude.

"A chap like Albro can't simply drop out of sight, like you or me might," said Cap'n Bartlet, thoughtfully. "He's filled too much space and pulled through too many scrapes. He's had his way too often with men and devils—and women too."

We were strung along the rail on the afterdeck of the little *Aurora Bird* as she began to grope her passage through the barrier reef, a silent lot. Talk had been cheap enough on the long stretch up the Coral Sea, when every possible theory of Albro's fate and the fate of his three white shipmates and their native crew had been thrashed to weariness. But now suspense held us all by the throat, for we were come at last to Barange, the falling-off place.

And something else held us—I could call it a spell and not be so far wrong. The lazy airs offshore bore down to us the scent that is like nothing else in the world, of rotting jungle and teeming soil; of poisonous, lush green, and rare, sleepy blossoms, heavy with death and ardent with a fierce vitality. This is the breath of Papua, stirring warm on her lips, that none who has known between loathing and desire can ever forget. Many men have known it, traders, pearlers,

recruiters, gold hunters, and eagerly have sought to know more and have died seeking. There she lies, the last enigma, guarding her secrets still behind her savage coasts and the fringe of her untracked forests —the black sphinx of the seas, lovely, vast, and cruel.

We had been watching the widening gap of the bay off our quarter, the palm-tufted threads of beach, the sullen hills aquiver in the heat haze and the nameless dim mountains beyond. For an hour or more the only sounds had been Bartlet's gruff orders to the Kanaka at the wheel, the gentle crush of foam overside, the musical cry of the leadsman and the tap-tap of reef points and creak of tackle as our sails slatted and filled again. Each one of us was intent for some sign of the disaster. Each one of us had a question pressing on his tongue—pretty much the same question, I judge —but nobody cared to voice it until the cap'n spoke. He had had, we knew, rather a special interest in Albro. . . . "Throw him how you like, he'd land on his feet," he said.

"Aye," confirmed Peters, the lank trader from Samarai. "Or if so be he couldn't stand, why the crowd would fair fight for the privilege of proppin' him up and buyin' him the last drink in the house."

"You think he's alive?" piped Harris then.

"I think he's alive," said Bartlet, without turning his shaggy grey head. "He weren't made to finish hugger-mugger in no such hell hole. I'm backing the luck of Jim Albro, that always had his way."

"Like as not," said Peters, and spun the cylinder of his big Webley revolver and chuckled a little; "like as not we'll find him sittin' on a stump all so lofty with the niggers squatted round in rows, addressin' of the congregation."

You will note—and a queer thing too—that this happened before we had learned the first sure detail of the affair at Barange Bay.

It was now the 20th of April. On the 2nd of November preceding, the pearling schooner *Timothy S.* had cleared from Cooktown on her lawful occasions for Joannet Harbour in the Louisiades. She had never reached Joannet. A month later she had been spoken by a Sydney steamer up among the Bismarck Group, where she had no ostensible business to be. And early in March some cannibal gossip of the west coast, friendly or only boastful, had passed word to some missionary of a British schooner cut off at Barange. That was strictly all. It remained for certain friends and backers at Cooktown, with or without lawful occasion, to link up the vaguely rumoured outrage with the actual and private destination of the *Timothy S.* and to send our search party go-look-see.

But Jeckol snorted. . . . You could hardly blame him, at that. Among the five of us he was the only man who had never crossed Jim Albro at one point or another in the career of that eccentric luminary. And, besides, it was Jeckol's business to snort. You must have read his clever bits in the *Bulletin*—those little running paragraphs that snap and fume like a pack of Chinese crackers? He had been loafing about Bananaland on vacation just before we started, and of course he got wind and wished himself along. Trust a pressman to know the necessary people and a chance for copy.

"I've heard a deal of talk of this Albro since we weighed anchor," he said. "What's all about him? He wasn't commanding the *Timothy S.*?"

" No," drawled Peters. " No—he didn't command, Mullhall was skipper."

" Did he launch the scheme then ? Was he the discoverer of this wonderful virgin shell bed they were going to strip ? "

" No," returned Peters. " No—you couldn't say he had any regular standin' in the expedition. . . . He shipped as a sort of supercargo—didn't he, Cap'n Bartlet ? "

" Cabin boy, more likely," said Bartlet in his slow way. " Or bos'n's mate—or even midshipmite."

Jeckol eyed us all around, but nobody smiled.

" You're getting at me," he said. " Never mind. Only I'm going to write the yarn, you know. You'd much better help me pick the right hero. What's your famous Albro like ? "

" The takingest chap that ever stood in shoe leather," cried young Harris with a rush. " Absolutely. I never saw him only twice, but I remember just how he looked and what he said. The first time he was drunk—but—but that was all right. He sang ' Mad Bess of Bedlam ' to make your hair curl. And one night in Brisbane when he took on the Castlereagh Slasher for two rounds——"

" Six foot of mad Irishman," said Peters, " and about three inches of dreamy Spaniard atop of that—to put a head on the mixture, you might say. Blue-black, wavy beard and an eye like a blue glass marble——"

" With the sunlight shining through ! " Harris shot in.

" James O'Shaughnessy Albro." Peters lingered upon the name. " As to his luck, Cap'n Bartlet may be right, but I wouldn't call it so. He was born too

late. He should ha' been a conquistador—d'y' call 'em?—and gone swaggerin' up and down in the old time holdin' pepper rajahs to ransom and carvin' out kingdoms. Whereas he was only Jim and anything you like between a navvy and a millionaire.

"Nobody knows what he'd done back home—prob'ly he got to bulgin' over too many boundaries and needed room. He blew into the Endeavour River one season with a tradin' schooner of his own—curly maple saloon, satin divans, silver-mounted gun racks—by Joe, you'd ha' thought he was goin' to trade with cherryubims for golden harps in the isles of paradise. And so he very nearly did, too, what with the dare-devil chances he took, till he lost craft and all on a race back from Thursday Island."

"Wrecked?" asked Jeckol.

"Just gambled. Old man Tyler could lay his *Hawfinch* half a point nearer the wind than a chap has a right to expect from an archbishop. Jimmie paid over at the dock head and went weavin' his way up Charlotte Street a beggar, turned into a political barney they were havin' there, and made them a roarin' speech on somethin'—temperance prob'ly. And, by Joe, if they didn't elect him a divisional councillor the next day!"

"I've heard of that," proffered Harris with a grin. "Wasn't it the same winter he did a quick dash to the tin mines for his health? It seemed there was a beauteous and wealthy widow. He couldn't have loved her half so well had he not loved her pretty underhouse-maid more. So he started for Mount Momeo. . . . My word, he'd turn the worst scrape into a romance, that fellow! They say he made a big winning at Romeo—just to console himself."

" He made a dozen winnings. And I've helped him to a job as warehouse clerk at Samarai when he wore no shirt under his coat, and gunny bags for trousies. That's what the cap'n here means by his luck, I fancy, because you couldn't keep him down. Capitalist, miner, politician, stevedore—it was all one to Jimmie. Look how he brought up the *Creswick* that nobody else would touch when she went ashore on Turn-again Island, cleared ten thou' off her by the nerviest kind of work and dropped it all on the next Melbourne Cup. Little he cared. He was havin' his own way with life—as you say, Cap'n Bartlet."

But Jeckol frowned and pursed his thin lips.

" He never saw the game that was too big for him," said Harris, " nor held back his smile nor his fist."

" Darlinghurst jail is full of the same sort," observed Jeckol dryly.

" You ask what he was like ? " Cap'n Bartlet swung around beside the wheel. " I'll tell you. I'm married to a girl that was pretty chief with Jim Albro once. There's no living man dare stand and say a word agen my wife—the finest in Queensland, sir—but I knew all the talk when I married her. And yet you see me here."

" Ah ! With an entirely friendly purpose ? " queried Jeckol, peering at him. " Or to make sure he won't come back ? " . . .

I saw the colour flood to Bartlet's rugged cheek and ebb again.

" In friendship," he answered simply.

Jeckol made a gesture like a salute, with a hint of mockery perhaps, but he said no more. And we others said rather less. Bartlet brought the schooner smartly about on her heel and laid her square through the

gap and we turned again to that sinister bay, opening before us like the painted depth of a stage set, whereon we were now to discover and reconstruct our obscure tragedy.

We drew a quick curtain on it. Scarcely had we come abreast the near headland when one of the brown, breech-clouted sailors leaped up forward with a yell, and each startled eye swept past his darting finger to the wreck of the *Timothy S.* There could be no manner of doubt—a green hull with a black water line, bedded low and on her side, hatches awash, just behind a shallow jag of the shore well away to leeward. We needed no glasses to pick her name or to see that nothing remained of life or value about the battered shell. She lay in her last berth, in the final stage of naval decay, stripped to the shreds of rigging, her masts broken short and bare as bleached bones; and from her whitened rail rose up a flight of boobies that cried like shrill, mournful ghosts and vanished. . . .

"Aye—that's the end of their pearlin' cruise," said Peters grimly. "That's Mullhall's craft, sure enough. The south-west gales would drive her there. She must ha' been anchored just about where we're passin' now, and I shouldn't wonder."

"On the shell bank?" sniffed Jeckol, leaning to squint down into the sparkling blue.

"Fair under our keel, I'd say."

At a signal the leadsman had flown his pigeon again, though we were well past all reefs.

"Twenty-two fathoms!" Harris echoed the cry. "That's diving! I heard it was a deep-water bed. D'you suppose they were at it when the niggers jumped 'em?"

"I figger they were," said Peters. "See that

scrubby bit of island?—the point's not a hundred yards away. A dozen canoes could mass up there and never be noticed. By Joe, it's plain as paint. The ship snugged down for business—the diver below, like as not—pumps and tackle goin'—all hands busy on board and the watch calculatin' profits to three decimals behind the windlass. Aye, there's your treasure hunter, every time! Then perhaps a slant of wind settin' around that point to give the raid a runnin' start—and——"

"Him finish," concluded Harris briefly. "All over in ten minutes. They'd hardly know what hit 'em. A black cloud—that's all. A black cloud."

And Peters was right—it was all too plain. None of us but had heard tales enough, and stark history enough, of these blood-stained barriers that hedge the true unknown continent. To our waiting minds his few phrases threw a sharp picture of the careless ship, the stalking death, and the swift horror that must have followed. There lay the wreck and there the empty bay. The rest we could fill in for ourselves, or just about.

"Then what are you doing here?" asked Jeckol at last.

Peters was already dealing out rifles and ammunition by the deck house, and Bartlet, looking drawn and old, did not seem to hear, but Harris jerked an answer over his shoulder with the flippancy of emotion. "Oh, you can't tell—we might find some smoked heads to bring away." . . .

A few minutes later the cap'n was giving his last instructions while we of the shore dropped to our places in the big whaleboat.

"You're not to follow us in whatever happens—mind that. If you sight more'n three canoes at a time, knock out the shackles and run for open sea. I'm leaving you Obadiah—he's a goodish shot—and four of the best boys."

The young mate nodded. He hated not coming with us, but Bartlet knew. This was Papua, where wise men take no chance and fools seldom live long enough to take a second.

We took none ourselves as we rowed slowly shoreward and sheered off out of spear throw, watching the wall of jungle. There is no beach inside Barange, only the mangrove roots that writhe down to the water's edge like tangled pythons through the oozy bank of salt marsh. It was very still and very clear in the afternoon sunlight, though the heat pouring out over us seemed the exhalation of a great steam bath, choked with stewing vegetation. Now and then our crew of clean-limbed Tonga boys rested on their oars, with timid, limpid gaze turned askance. We heard their quick breathing and the drip from the oar blades—nothing else. At such times we floated in a mirage where each leaf and frond and looped liana with its mirrored image had an unnatural brilliance and precision, like a laboured canvas or a view seen through a stereoscope.

And there stole upon us again the oppressive solicitation of the land, subtle and perilous. Behind the beauty and wonder of it, beyond those bright shores and the first low foot-hills of the range—what? Nobody knows, that is the charm and the lure. Peoples, religions, empires untouched since the birth of time—fabulous wealth, mountains of gold, cliffs of ruby,

" cataracts of adamant," any marvel that fantasy still dares to dream in a prosaic century. They may be; no man has ever drawn the map to deny them. They must be: why else should the sphinx smile? . . .

" I suppose a hundred woolly-heads are spying on us now," whispered Jeckol suddenly. " Why don't they do something? " He fiddled nervously with his rifle and sniffed. " What a place! This air is deadly —rotten with fever. Faugh! It's animal. It's like —it's like a tiger's throat! "

I blinked at the little chap and with the same glance was aware of Peters standing up in the bow. The trader was just lighting a short-fused stick of dynamite from his cigar. Before I could cry murder he had lobbed it in and shot the bush.

It struck with the smash of all calamity in that utter quiet. The trees sprang toward us and the roar rolled back from angry rocks. Like a multi-coloured dust of the explosion burst a myriad of screaming birds, lories, parakeets, kingfishers, flashing motes of green and blue and scarlet in the sunshine. But they dwindled and passed. The echoes died. The smoke drifted away and the green wall closed up without a scar; the silence engulfed us once more, floating there, futile invaders who assaulted its immense riddle with a squib.

" They don't seem to care much," giggled Jeckol.

But Bartlet raised a finger. Far away in the wood something stirred. It drew nearer, with long pauses, pressing on and at last charging recklessly through the undergrowth. We had the spot covered from half a dozen rifles as there broke out at the verge a creature that leaped and clung among the creepers.

" Mahrster! " it cried, imploring. " Mahrster! "

A man—though more like a naked, starving ape with his knobby joints and the bones in a rack under his black skin—and shaken now by the ecstasy of terror! Not at us. He faced the guns without wincing. His beady eyes kept coasting behind him the way he had come as if he looked to see a dreadful hand reach from the thicket and pluck him back. The jungle, the land, was what he feared.

"Mahrster," he gasped, "you take'm me that fella boat along you! One fella ship-boy me—good fella too much!"

"What name?" challenged Peters. "What fella ship?"

From the chattered reply we caught a startling word.

"By Joe—he's one of their boys! Give way, cap'n. . . ."

We edged in until Peters could yank the quaking bundle aboard and pulled again to safety from the mangrove shadow, while the fugitive stammered his story in broken *bêche de mer*.

It was true, we had found a survivor from the lost *Timothy S.*: Kakwe, he called himself, and he had come to Barange "long time before altogether." Two months, at least, we judged. In the attack on the schooner he had escaped by swimming. Himself a Papuan, of a different tribe and region, he had taken to the tree tops after the fashion of his own people, the painted monkey folk of Princess Marianne Straits—a facility to which he owed his life, it appeared, for he had since lived on fruits and nuts among the cockatoos, undiscovered.

This much we gathered from his gabble before Peters caught him up.

"But the others—them white fella?"

"All finish," said Kakwe bluntly.

"How?" cried Peters.

"No savee, me. Too much fright—walk along salt water—get to hell along beach, along tree. Me fright like hell!"

His account tallied with our own theory of the massacre, but he had seen no bodies brought ashore, could not identify the murderers, could not say where the native village lay or how to reach it, would not guide any one into that bush on any consideration. For the rest—this was a "good fella place" to get away from quickly.

"Ah!" said Jeckol, sympathizing. "And that's a true word."

So indeed it seemed, and it is odd to think how close we were to giving up then. Aye, we were that close. We drifted out toward the anchorage and looked helplessly around us. The place was so huge, so baffling. Hopeless to search farther among empty swamps and forests, to grope at large in this hushed wilderness, to coerce a jungle. The cruisers that have bombarded these same coasts on many a punitive expedition have learned how hopeless—against Papua, who keeps her secrets.

We must have been half-way back to the *Aurora Bird* when Bartlet, sitting thoughtful in the stern, made the sign that brought us all up sharp.

"He's lying," he said quietly.

Jeckol's nerves jumped in protest.

"Eh—what? The black? He's only scared half to death. You wouldn't blame him for wanting to get out of this trap, would you? I do myself."

"He couldn't have lived overhead the whole nest

o' them all this time without learning something," declared Bartlet.

" Why should he lie ? "

But Peters had risen to snatch around that weazened face, blank as a mummy's—his own was alight. " By Joe, and a timely reminder. When you've got to ask why a Papuan nigger should lie you've gone pretty wide ! As for scare—what d'y' suppose he must ha' seen to scare him so ? "

Here he bent our monkey man over a thwart and introduced him affectionately to the Webley. . . .

" You fella Kakwe," he said, " my survivin' jewel—I forgot your breed. I should ha' begun by bang'm black head b'long you. Now don't stop to gammon. Whatever you're holdin' back you *show*—savee ? S'pose you no show'm straight, me finish 'long you close up altogether ! "

And Kakwe showed. Dominated by superior wickedness, with all the black man's docility under the instant threat, he collapsed quite simply at the touch of steel, and he showed—the nook where a tiny, hidden creek flowed down among the mangroves, the winding course that led by the swamp's edge through dank and darksome channels to a trodden mud bank and Barange village itself, tucked away there like a huddle of giant hives in a back lot. This time we paused for no manœuvring. Even Jeckol grabbed a boat-hook and we pushed through, eager to strike on a definite lead at last.

Though we might have saved our energy, for the wild had its surprise in waiting. The village was silent, deserted, tenantless.

We landed at the square, to call it so, a rude clearing on which the few houses faced, those sprawling,

spacious communal dwellings—palaces among huts—that sometimes amaze the explorer along the west coast. None opposed us. Nothing moved, not so much as a curl of smoke. An insect hummed in the sun like a bullet, and I take no shame to say I ducked. But that was all. And when the grovelling Kakwe led us to a wide platform that ran breast high across the front of the largest house, we stood with rifles propped and quickened pulses, staring stupidly at the thing we had come this far to find. . . .

Only a box, lying on the middle of the platform, under the shadow of the lofty thatch—a small, brass-bound chest such as sailormen love and ships carry everywhere! "Loot!" snorted Jeckol. "Well——?"

But Cap'n Bartlet had laid hold of another trove, a coil of ringed rubber tubing, neatly disposed about the chest. "What's there?"

"A diver's air pipe," stated the cap'n.

"What about it?"

"It's been cut—top and bottom."

We crowded for a look, and I saw his tanned fist tremble ever so slightly.

"A diver's pipe," he repeated. "A diver, d'you see? They had a diver, and—according to your notion, Peters——" He drew a slow breath. "What—what if that there diver *did* happen to be overboard at the minute the rush came?"

And then came the voice of Peters, cool and drawling: "Some one's left a message on the box."

As we spun around he turned it over atilt, so that all might see the bold letters, scarred in lead, of that laconic legend—all but Bartlet, who fumbled for his spectacles. "Writ with a Snider bullet, I take it,"

continued the trader. "One of them soft-nosed kind as supplied to heathen parts for a blessin' of civilization."

"Read it, can't you?" begged the cap'n.

And this was the notice Jeckol read:

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The Crew of the Schooner *Timothy S.* of Cooktown that tried a cast with fortune and turned a deuce. Barange Bay, Jan. 22, 19—

J. MULLHALL, *master* — BAMBA, KOHO
B. SMYTHE, *mate* — KAKWE, JACK-JACK
HENRY NEW — MENOMI, FRANK

Hic finis fandi

+

Cap'n Bartlet removed his hat and wiped away a steam of sweat with deliberate care and a red-barred kerchief. "Sounds natural," he observed, clearing his throat. "Though I never did make much of that 'hic' language."

"It means 'here ended the talk,' or something of the kind," explained Jeckol. "But still," he added, quite seriously, "the list isn't complete, you know. Where's your friend Albro?"

Peters rolled the white of an eye on him. "Is it your fancy," he inquired, "that the niggers run much to writin' epitaphs? Or books——?"

He held up to our gaze the object he had found on lifting the lid of the box—a packet of thin bark strips covered with coarse markings and bound with a twist of fibre which next he unknotted, to run the leaves over in his hand. "I knew he was alive," said Cap'n Bartlet simply. . . .

And that was the way we won to the story of James O'Shaughnessy Albro. Even now I can recall each

tone and gesture of its telling each detail of the group we made there in empty Barange village : the trader's drawl and check as he read a line or turned to Kakwe with a question or flung in some vivid comment of his own ; the strained attention on Bartlet's earnest face ; the incredulous sniff and squint of little Jeckol, still unsubdued, fidgeting about ; the statued bronze figures of our Tonga boys as they stood leaning patiently on their rifles, awaiting the master's next whim ; the massed ring of the jungle ; the odd, high-peaked houses with their cavernous fronts like gaping and grinning listeners ; the lances of sunlight that began to splinter and fall out among lengthening shadows across the open ; and through all and over all the heat and the smell and the brooding, ominous, inscrutable mystery of Papua !

Seeking wealth I found glory. I went below as an amateur diver and I came up a professional god. But I wish I could find which son of a nighthawk it was that cut my pipe. I'd excommunicate him on the altar.

This is a page from the Book of Jim Albro, and it shows him as he lived. Later entries are not so clear, not by any means so sprightly, and some are pitiful enough in all truth. It must have been set down in the early hours of his reign, while he was still in the flush of his stupendous adventure, before he had begun to understand what lay ahead. But here was the man " with an eye like a blue glass marble," that " never held his fist or his smile." No other could have written it after the events he had survived.

Just as Peters inferred to have been the case, the attack on the *Timothy S.* caught the whole crew of pearl hunters unready. They had seen no natives at

Barange, they kept no lookout, and when Albro stepped off the ladder that morning of January 22 he left his shipmates contentedly employed on deck. He never saw any of them again, or—what might have been a different matter—any part of them. He went down to the shell bed, and while he was there the black raiders made their sweep of the schooner.

It is likely the savages took the diving lines for an extra mooring—it is certain they knew nothing whatever about the apparatus—and Albro's first warning was the cutting of that air pipe, when he found his pressure gone and water trickling through the inlet valve. Fortunately, he was just preparing to ascend and had tightened his outlet to inflate the suit. Fortunately, too, his helmet was furnished with an adjustable inlet and he was able hastily to close both valves.

He tugged at his life-line, but it drew loose in his hand. He turned over on his side to look upward, but he could see nothing—only the vague blue twilight through which the slack coils of his severed air pipe came sagging. Then he knew that he had been cut off, and the hideous fear that lies in wait for every diver, amid the perils and loneliness of the sea bottom seized upon him. He might have popped to the surface by throwing off his forty-pound weights, but he was aware that no chance accident could have served him so, and his impulse was to get away, from schooner and all, to shore. Under water he had some few minutes to live, perhaps four or five, as long as the inclosed air should last him. Frantically he began to struggle toward the beach, yielding to a moment's panic that was to cost him dear. . . . While trying blindly to slash free the useless pipe he lost his diver's knife.

The rotten coral burst and sank under footing. Clogging weeds enwreathed and held him back with evil embrace. A tridacna spread its jaws before his steps so that he nearly plunged into that deadly spring trap of the deep. But he kept on up the slope; his keen spirit rallied and bore him through, and he came surging from the waves at last on a point of rocks outside the bay where he could cling and open the emergency cock in the helmet. The suit deflated and he breathed new life. But here he suffered his second immediate mishap, for as he scrambled to his feet a dizziness took him and he slipped and pitched forward heavily, and with a great clang of armour the god fell fainting at the very threshold of his world.

Broke left arm getting ashore. Walking the beach when I met the niggers. They dropped on their faces, and I saw I was elected.

These are the words with which Jim Albro chooses to make his note of a scene that can scarcely have had its parallel in human experience. With two dozen words, no more. You figure him there, I hope, that muffled colossus with his huge copper helm flashing red and his monstrous cyclopean eye agleam, striding along the strip of white beach against the hostile green hills of Papua. You see him break, an incredible apparition of power and majesty, upon the view of the dusky cannibal folk and stand towering over their stricken ranks, triumphant—a glimpse as through the flick of a shutter that passes and leaves the beholder dazzled and unsatisfied! But the whole record is only a series of such glimpses, some focused with startling lucidity, some clouded and confused, and all too brief.

One other bit remains to fix the picture—an inimit-

able splash of colour, flung at the end of a perplexing page. . . .

I picked out the chief devil-devil doctor, and raised him to honour. Old Gum-eye. Friend of mine.

Mark the spirit of the man. Whole chapters could supply no clearer tribute to his resilience and entire adequacy. Unerringly he took the right course to enforce the rôle thus amazingly thrust upon him and to establish his godhead. Already he had caught up the situation, had put its shock behind him. The inscription on the box remains his only reference to the loss of the schooner and her crew. And while this might seem to argue a certain lack of sensibility, I cannot feel it was so with Albro. His was a nature essentially episodic, prompt to the play of circumstance. The thing was done and past crying over ; the blacks had acted by their lights, and he had very swiftly to act by his. They had given him his cue. How well he filled the part we can guess. By evening he had been installed in some kind of temple or devil house as an accredited deity to the Barange tribes. . . .

Here ends the first part of the book, so far as its unnumbered and fugitive entries can be arranged—the first part and the only part quite comprehensible, before the haze of distress and anxiety has dimmed our image of that strange god, whose mortality was all too real. He began its composition that same night, picking up the Snider cartridge and the bark strips while still he had some measure of liberty. Perhaps he foresaw that he would want to leave the record. Perhaps he merely sought distraction, and he had need of it.

Squatting above his own altar, he prepared his own epistle. Around his sanctuary slept a guard of devil doctors, priests, sorcerers—he uses all three terms. No sleep for Albro. But while he wrestled there alone through long hours he found the pluck to jot those early notes by the flare of a guttering torch, beguiling the pain of his broken arm and the new terror that was now rapidly closing upon him.

Like a glint of lightning from a cloud comes the following spurted item, written the next day:

Forty hours of this. Am growing weaker. My arm—[word scratched out]. Had to give up trying to start the glass in my helmet. Can't budge it. . . .

Soon afterwards occurs another passage in the same startling altered key:

Tried to get away this [morning], but the priests too suspicious. I wanted to try smashing the glass on a rock. Likely would have burst my ear drums anyway——

And further:

If I could get hold of a knife for three minutes. Bamboo stick [part illegible here]—can't tear vulcan canvas. No use. . . .

When Peters read those lines aloud and looked up he confronted a sickly ring of auditors.

"Good God!" breathed Bartlet. "*He couldn't get out!*"

The knowledge of Albro's actual plight crashed upon us all in just that phrase, and I leave you to gauge its impact. We had had no hint of it. Here was the diary before us. We were only waiting to learn the present address of the diarist. Indeed our whole attitude toward the singular discovery we were making had been quite cheerful, even exultant, like that of

children who follow the tribulations of some favourite hero, secure of the happy solution.

"Couldn't get *out*?" squeaked Jeckol. "How do you mean—he couldn't?"

"He was locked up in that blasted diving dress!"

"Locked up?" . . .

"Sewed up—sacked up," said Peters heavily. "Did you ever see the damn' stuff? He calls it canvas, which it ain't, but tanned twill—two-ply—with rubber between. He can't tear his way out with a stick, he says. And small wonder. Talk about strait-jackets!"

"But—but why doesn't he take off the helmet?"

Peters stared unseeing at the packet in his hand, and his face was saturnine.

"By Joe, what a mess!" he murmured. "What a beau-ti-ful mess! Look here—d'y' know a diver's outfit? First he wears a solid breastplate—see?—that sets about his shoulders. Then the helmet fits on that with segmental neck rings and screws hard down with a quarter turn to a catch. Aye, there's a catch to snap it home. . . . And where is that catch? Why, at the *back*! No diver was ever intended to take off his own helmet!"

We could only blink at him dumbly.

"Albro couldn't reach it. Of course if he should manage to rip away the cloth from the eyelets he'd be all right—he'd simply shift the whole upper works. But them eyelets, now, they lock down all around through a vulcanized collar. He couldn't reach more'n two of them either."

"There's the glass——"

Peters offered the diary.

"What does he say himself? There's only one

removable glass to a helmet and that's in front—an inch thick and screws tight in a gun-metal socket. It's guarded with a gridiron of bars—same as the two side glasses. He wants to break it, but he can't. He wants to unscrew it, but he can't. He wants to cut himself loose, but he has no knife. Do you see him—by Joe!—do you see him twistin' and writhin' and fightin' for his life in there—*with one good arm*?"

"Why," cried Jeckol, in sudden appalled perception, "he couldn't even eat. He's starving inside that suit!"

"Starving?" echoed Bartlet, from colourless lips. "God—if that was all! He's dying of thirst by inches!" . . .

I do not know how it struck Jeckol, but it seemed to me as if a blackness came in upon the sun.

"Go on," urged Bartlet. "Go on!"

But it was not so easy to go on. Peters found whole pages of the Book impossible to decipher. At places it lapsed to a mere jumble of sprawling characters. Again the soft lead was hopelessly blurred over, where the pages had been often thumbed, or perhaps crumbled and thrown aside. He shuffled them hastily and we hung upon his search.

. . . uneasy god. They got me tied up now to keep me safe [words missing] joke, to pass out here like a rat under a bell jar. Not me. I don't mean to. . . .

Curious. When Peters resumed the thread, when he read that eloquent line, those of us who had known Jim Albro nodded solemnly, one to another, as if sharing a profound and secret thrill. For this was the man's real triumph—and we felt it then, regardless of the outcome—that alone, beyond any conceivable aid

for the first time in his life, speechless, helpless, at the end of all those amiable arts which had given him his way so often with men and devils, and women, too, Jim Albro was still the Jim Albro " that you couldn't keep down."

His body was consuming and shrivelling with its own heat. He had to scheme for each scant breath he drew, spreading the dress and collapsing it at short intervals to renew the foul air. He had to view the tempting tribute laid out before the altar: juicy mangoes and figs and sugar-cane, wild berries and young drinking coco-nuts freshly opened, with the new, cool milk frothing up at the brim. He had to receive the homage of a people, and to count by the wheeling sun how many hours of torment were left him. Worse than all, he had to withstand the pitiless irony of it, the derisive grin of fate that drives men mad. He did these things, and he would not yield. He did not mean to. And lest you should think the phrase a mere flourish—observe the testimony of the Book. . . .

The tribes flocked in that second day to do him honour. There was a great gathering in the square. Some vivid pantomime was displayed before the high seat. Some unusual rites were enacted before the temple, when the bamboo pipes and drums were going and the doctors wore their vermilion mop wigs and masks of ceremony and chains of naked dancers were stamping and circling to the chant. Jim Albro watched and noted it all behind his solid inch of plate glass; not passively, not indifferently, but with close attention and the very liveliest interest. Aye, this god took an interest in the welfare of his people!

Heaven knows what he saw in the Papuans of

Barange. By all accounts they are a plum-black race of rather superior ferocity—six feet is their medium stature, and their favourite dish a human ear, nicely broiled. So the old traders report, and never an explorer has improved the description. It required some one who could sit down among them without losing his head—quite literally—to learn more. Albro filled the bill. He had nothing to do but to sit. And while he sat he busied himself with the thoughts that have made the strangest, and blindest, reading in the diary.

A prime lot of raw material. Why [do ?] people always lie about niggers ? Unspoiled [part illegible] the makings. Their orators told me in dumb show [words missing] behind the hills [lines missing]. . . . Wonderful !

Wonderful, he says. Wonderful what ? Chances, perhaps. Opportunities. Possibilities. Certainly nobody else ever had such as lay before Jim Albro if he could have won free to take them, as a conqueror, as a god. Was he dreaming even then of empire ? Had he had a glimpse into the meaning of Papua that struck fire to his roving and restless soul ? Had he fallen enamoured of the sphinx, and had she drawn the veil for him ? It may be. The fact stands that, fevered and tortured as he was, burning with thirst and pain, he discovered something capable of rousing that cry from him. We hear the cry, and that is all we hear—nearly.

. . . suppose I should take a hand at this dumb show myself. I could do it. I know I could. Am going to trust old Gum-eye. And afterward . . .

Peters looked up from the last page.

" Well ? " said Jeckol impatiently.

" That's the end," announced Peters.

I cannot say what the breathless group of us had been expecting. Possibly the first-hand memoir of a miracle would have satisfied us, or the harrowing confessions and last wishes of the moribund. But so natural and unfanciful a thing as a full stop to the tension left us stupefied. We felt aggrieved, too, as if the author should have postponed his business long enough to let us know whether he was dead or not.

" It can't be ! " cried Jeckol, all abroad. " How could it end there ? What happened to him ? Where is he ? "

Peters swung his gaze around the vacant clearing and the impenetrable palisade of the forest.

" This was written three months ago, remember," he said."

" But he had a plan," insisted Jeckol. " He surely had a plan. He says he was going to do something. He'd found a friend he could trust. What next ? "

" The friend must ha' failed him."

Cap'n Bartlet shook himself like one awaking. " No friend would have failed him," he said deliberately. " And—you're forgetting that ship-boy again."

Once more, with a rattled oath, Peters pounced on the unfortunate Kakwe, quailing beside him. Once more he brought to bear the persuasion he best knew how to use ; and once more the black boy submitted, wholly, and showed. He had nothing to tell. He could throw no light on events. But he had seen from the trees where the " white fella mahrster him diver " forgathered with all the fiends of the pit, whereat he was " too much fright," and he showed us this time up the platform of the identical wide-thatched house

by which we had been standing. We crept in through the low entrance and across a floor of sagging bamboo mats and found ourselves before a curtain of pandanus that hung midway. We were long past astonishment, but Jeckol, arresting a gesture, dropped his hand.

"I daren't," he whimpered.

It was Bartlet who put the curtain aside. And there, in the twilight of the place, we saw the god as he had appeared in his recent earthly phase. His great copper head gleamed at the back of a shallow niche, made fast against the wall. The muffled, stiff clumsiness of his diving dress revealed an heroic figure, still disposed in the attitude of a sitting Buddha, with the leaden-soled diving shoes thrust out by either knee. His single huge eye glared down at us balefully from over the altar as we stood, overwhelmed in the presence.

"And so he did—pass out," said Jeckol.

Something had caught the quick eye of Peters. Horrified, we saw him step forward and lay a vigorous and sacrilegious hold on that high divinity, saw the shape start and tremble as with life, saw it shake and flutter like a bundle of rags in the wind, and flap—emptily. . . .

"Yes," said Peters. "He's passed out, right enough. Leastways from here. Passed out, and on. And quite easy too. Look at these slits—would you?"

The diving suit had been laid open like a stripped pelt with long cuts of a keen blade, one down the middle of the back, one across the shoulders, and others connected along the inside of each limb to the wrists and ankles.

"Gone!"

"Gone," confirmed Peters. "Whether the niggers dug him from it piece by piece like the kernel from a nut or whether that friend of his helped him to shed complete—you can take your choice. In either case he's gone—and gone this time to stay."

"There's no—no blood!" gasped Jeckol. "Anyhow!"

Cap'n Bartlet had removed his hat to polish his shiny forehead with the colourful kerchief, and he was looking out of the door over the tops of the trees to the far blue and nameless mountains of Papua, with an eye at peace.

"You could always bank on the luck of James O'Shaughnessy Albro," he said simply. "I knew he was alive."

But Jeckol was still reeling.

"I shan't write this yarn," he assured us earnestly. "It's too—it's too—and besides, there's no end to it. . . ."

"*Hic finis fandi*," suggested Peters.

THE PASSION-VINE

IT is difficult to find an excuse for Miss Matilda. She was a missionary's daughter, committed to the sacred cause of respectability in a far land. Motauri was a gentleman of sorts and a scholar after his own fashion, a high chief and a descendant of kings; but he was also a native and a pagan. Strictly, it should have been nothing to Miss Matilda that Motauri looked most distractingly like a young woodland god, with a skin the exact shade of new heather honey, the curly ringlets of a faun, the features of a Roman cameo and the build of a Greek athlete.

Being a chief in the flower valley of Wailoa meant that Motauri owned a stated number of coco-nut-trees and never had to do anything except to swim and to laugh, to chase the rainbow-fish a fathom deep and to play divinely on the nose-flute. But being as handsome as Motauri meant that many a maiden heart must sigh after him and flutter in strange, wild rhythm under the compelling of his gentle glance. This was all very well so long as the maidens were among his own people. It took a different aspect when he turned the said glance on Miss Matilda, who was white and slim and wore mitts to keep her hands from tanning, and did crewelwork in the veranda of her father's house behind the splendid screen of the passion-vine.

. . .

Now falling in love with a man of colour is distinctly one of the things that are not done—that scarcely endure to be spoken of. We have it on the very highest authority that the East has a stubborn habit of never being the West. Where two eligible persons of opposite sex are concerned the stark geographic, not to say ethnologic, fact comes grimly into play, and never these twain shall meet; or, anyway, the world agrees they never ought.

Yet Miss Matilda had been meeting Motauri. Perhaps the passion-vine was to blame. The passion-vine is too exuberant to be altogether respectable. One cannot live in an atmosphere of passion-vine—and that embraces all the heady scent and vivid tint and soft luxuriance of the islands where life goes as sweetly as a song; the warm caress of the trade-wind, the diamond dance of spray; the throbbing organ-pipe of the reef, the bridal-veiling of mountain streams, the flaunting of palm and plantain, the twinkling signal of fireflies at dusk—one cannot live with all this and confine one's emotions to a conventional pattern of grey and blue worsted yarns. At least one has trouble in so doing while the thrill and spring of youth remain.

They remained with Miss Matilda, though guarded by natural discretion. Nothing could have been cooler than the gleam of her starched gingham, as she moved sedately down the mountain path to chapel of a Sunday morning. Nothing more demure than the droop of her lashes under the rim of the severe, Quakerish bonnet, as she smote the wheezy old melodeon for the dusky choir. In that flawless face, a little faded, a little wearied, you would have sought vainly for any hint of hard repression, for any ravaging of secret revolt—unless, like Hull Gregson, the trader, you had

made a despairing study of it and had kept its image before your hot eyes throughout long, sleepless nights; unless, more particularly, like Motauri, you had been privileged to see it by the moonlight that sifts through the rifts of the passion-vine. Then, perhaps . . .

Certainly her excellent father would have been the last, unprompted and of his own motion, to develop any such suspicion. Pastor Spener had learned to fight shy of so many suspicions, so many discomfortable questions. And this was well. Otherwise he might have been led to wonder occasionally at her own presence and his own work; at the whole imposed and artificial shadow of a bleak civilization upon these sunny isles, these last remnants of an earthly paradise.

He seldom permitted himself to wonder about anything except the singular inadequacy of mission support and the rising cost per head of making converts, and keeping them. But there were times when he chanced to consider, perhaps, some drunken derelict outsprawled by a hospitable breadfruit, or again some lovely sea-born creature of his flock, stumbling past in all the naïve absurdity of Mother Hubbard and brogans —these were moments that brought doubt to the good pastor; moments when he glimpsed the unanswered problem of commingled races, of white exile and brown host, of lonely invader and docile subject.

"We have our little trials——" he said, and smoothed them rather fretfully, and as speedily as might be, from his pink, bald brow and laid them with the well-ordered welt of ungreyed hair atop.

For had he not also his mission, his infant class, his home, his books, his reports?—a whole solid and established institution from which to draw the protective formulæ of respectability. Even in the lands of

the passion-vine, the Pastor Speners will inevitably gather such formulæ about them as a snail secretes its shell. . . .

"Undeniably," he said, abstractedly, "we have our perplexities. Guidance is not always forthcoming in these matters. Would you take the little money we have put by—you remember we were going to purchase a new oil lamp for the chapel—would you take that money to buy yellow ribbons for Jeremiah's Loo?"

"Why does Jeremiah's Loo need ribbons?" asked Miss Matilda.

"She is going to marry that tramp shell-buyer from Papeete. At least she consents to a ceremony, if she can have the ribbons. A wild girl. I've never had much hold over her. . . . It would be in some sort a bribe, I admit——"

Father and daughter were seated in the arboured veranda at the daily solemn rite of tea. For many years Pastor Spener had been used to hold forth on sins and vanities at this hour before twilight. For many years the meek partner of his joys and sorrows had assisted there, dispensing the scant manna of dry toast and tapping the prim bulk of the tea-urn—that sure rock of respectability the world around. And since she had passed to the tiny cemetery on the hillside, it had not been easy to alter the patriarchal custom; not easy always to remember that the place across from him was now filled by another, a younger, and in the ways of the world and the flesh, a wholly innocent auditor.

Ordinarily Miss Matilda did little to remind him. Ordinarily she listened with the same meek deference. But Miss Matilda's state of mind for some time past

had been very far from ordinary; it chanced that on this particular afternoon the private, the very private, affairs of Miss Matilda had brought her to a condition altogether extraordinary—almost reckless.

"You don't know the man," she suggested, "or anything about him."

He blinked.

"I don't—no. Nothing good."

"Still you are willing to marry them."

Now this was a clear departure, and a daring one, but considering all things perhaps not strange.

For the last thirty minutes, since the pastor's return from the village below, Miss Matilda had been conscious of a tension in the domestic air. Up to his mention of Jeremiah's Loo an oppressive silence had brooded, and from his manner of eyeing her over his teacup there was reason to fear that something more troublous than yellow ribbons had ruffled his pink serenity. If Miss Matilda had been the trembling kind, she would have trembled now at her own temerity—the result of indefinable impulse. And yet when his answer came it was no rebuke, rather it was eager, with an unwonted touch of embarrassment.

"What would you have me do, my dear?" he said. "I can't pass judgment on these people. Our society is limited—largely primitive. How many months is it since you saw another white woman here in Wailoa, for instance? They wish to wed—that's enough."

"The man is white and the girl is a native, and you would marry them so readily?"

Miss Matilda put the query with perfect outward calm. The Reverend Spener himself was the one to clatter his cup.

"What would you have?" he repeated. "I marry them; yes, I will marry any that ask—barring known criminals—and only too thankful to lend religious sanction. Because—don't you see?—they are bound to marry anyhow. Matilda——" He brought up short and regarded her with sharpened concern, very curious for a man who was commonly so sure of himself. "My dear daughter, I don't believe I've ever explained this point to you before. It's not—er—it's a subject rather awkward to discuss. But since we've reached it, there is a need why I should intrude briefly upon your delicacy. . . . A very definite need."

If she gave a quick movement, it was only to set the tea-cosy in place. If there came a flush athwart her pale cheek, it might have been a chance ray of the deep western sun, filtering through the trellis.

"Yes?" she said.

"I am quite clear about the marriages. Quite clear. I cannot say I advocate them, but in any such community as ours they have always been inevitable. The missionary merely provides the service of the Church, as in duty bound. Who shall deny that he does the Lord's work toward unifying the island type?" He blinked nervously, balked at his own lead and started again.

"As to any stigma that may attach to such a union—really, you know, it's not as if our natives had the least negroid taint. They are Caucasians. Yes, my dear, that is scientifically true. The Polynesian people are an early migration of the great Caucasian race. Besides which, they are very fair to look upon—undeniably—very fair indeed."

She sat transfixed, but the most amazing part was to come. . . .

"Consider, moreover," he pleaded—actually it was as if he pleaded—"consider the position of the resident white in these isles, far from the restraints and manifold affairs of his own world. Life is apt to become very dreary, very monotonous for him. Ah, yes, Matilda, you could scarce imagine, but it palls—er—palls. He requires—er—diversion, as it were, companionship, a personal share in such charm and—er—sensuous appeal as flourish so richly on all sides of him. Have you ever thought of the question in that light? You haven't, of course, my dear. But consider the temptation."

He ended by retreating hastily behind his teacup, quite unnecessarily, as it proved. Miss Matilda was in no condition just then to deploy the expected maidenly emotions. "Consider!" Had she not? Had she been thinking of anything else these past feverish weeks? What other exile could have taught any secrets of monotony or dreariness to the daughter of a lone missionary?

Chapel, school, home, and chapel again, and in this round each daily move foreseen and prescribed. An hour for getting up and an hour for lying down; an hour for eating and an hour for praying; for turning a page and for threading a needle. No escape from the small formal proprieties in which her father had moulded their lives. No friend, no neighbour, no acquaintance except native pupils and servants. No stimulus except the moral discourse of a reverend tyrant. No interests except the same petty worries and the same money needs. . . .

From where she sat in the veranda she could see

no single object to break the deadly sameness of it. There were the same sticks of unsuitable furniture in the same immutable order, the same rugs at the same angles; the same dishes, the same books, the same pictures on the walls—"The Prodigal's Return," chromo-lithograph, in a South Pacific isle! And all this not merely happening so, as it might very well happen elsewhere. Here it was laboriously achieved, a triumph of formulated rectitude, transplanted bodily for a reproof and an example to the heart of the riotous tropics. . . .

"Why did you say there was need to explain to me, father?" she managed to ask at last.

But the pastor had had time to reform his lines.

"I spoke somewhat at large," he said, with a wave. "My specific purpose was to define an attitude which perhaps you may have mistaken—to warn you against undue intolerance, my dear. You see, as a matter of fact, I had a talk to-day on this same head—quite a helpful talk—with Captain Gregson."

For all her preoccupation with her own problems, the name caught her with new astonishment.

"Gregson! The trader?"

"Captain," he repeated, significantly. "Captain Gregson."

"You talked with him?" she exclaimed. "But he—but you——I've heard you say——"

Thereupon Pastor Spener took the upper hand decisively, like one who has come off well in an anxious skirmish over difficult ground.

"Never mind what you have heard, my dear. Many things have been said of him—idle chatter of the beaches. He has been sadly misjudged. Captain Gregson is a very remarkable man, besides being the

wealthiest in the islands—undeniably, quite the wealthiest. . . . He intends joining our church."

Miss Matilda rose from the table and moved away to the open side of the veranda, looking off to seaward. Tall, erect, with her hands resting on the high rail, she made a decorous and restful figure against the sunset sky. But those hands, so casual seeming, were driving their nails into the wood. For within the maiden breast of Miss Matilda, behind that obtrusive composure, there seethed a tumult of question, alarm, bewilderment. . . .

This startling dissertation of her father's—she could not begin to think what it meant. Was it possible, in spite of all assurance, was it possible that he knew, had heard or guessed—about Motauri? And if he had, was it conceivable that he should speak so—to state, as it might be, the very terms of her guilt, an actual plea for that unnameable temptation to which she had been drifting? It was mad. She could no longer be sure of anything, of her safety, her purpose, her father, herself—truly, of herself. And Gregson! An evil presentiment had pierced her at his mention of the gross, dark, enigmatic trader, whose intent regard she had felt fixed upon her so often—whenever she met him on the village path or passed his broad-eaved house by the beach. What did it mean?

Through a gap in the passion-vine she gazed out and over the whole side of the mountain into the wide glory of the sunset. There was nothing to interrupt that full outward sweep, nothing between her and the horizon.

The parsonage at Wailoa could never have been placed or built by any one of the Reverend Spener's level temperament. He had never found anything but a grievance in the fact that he should have to dwell so

far aloft from routine affairs in a spot of the wildest and most romantic beauty. The village itself lay hidden below and to the left, at the mouth of the valley, whence the smoke of its hearths rose as incense. Halfway up the winding track stood his little chapel in a grove of limes. And here on a higher terrace of the basalt cliff, like an eyrie—or, perhaps more fittingly, a swallow's nest—was perched the pastor's home. The lush growth of an untamed jungle massed up to its step; beetling heights menaced it from behind; and always, at all seasons, a rushing mountain torrent in the ravine beside made its flimsy walls to thrill, disturbed its peace with musical clamour.

That stream should have been indicted for trespass and disorder by the worthy pastor's way of thinking. Somehow all the unruly and wayward elements of his charge seemed to find expression in those singing waters, which were not to be dammed or turned aside. From the veranda-rail one might lean and toss anything —a passion-flower—into the current and follow it as it danced away down the broken slide, lost here and there amid mists and milky pools and the shadowing tangle of lianas, snatched at last through a chute and over a sheer outfall, to reappear some minutes later as a spark in the fret of the surf far below.

Standing there at the verge of the world, Miss Matilda watched the day's end. For a time the bright gates stayed open at the end of an unrolled, flaming carpet across the sea, then slowly drew in, implacably swung to, while the belated spirit sprang hurrying forward—too late. With an almost audible brazen clang they closed, and Miss Matilda drew back, chilled, as the veranda shook to a heavy footfall. . . .

" Ah, Captain Gregson—step up, sir." Her father's voice was unctuous with welcome as he hastened to meet the ponderous bulk that loomed through the dusk. " Happily met, sir. You are just in time to join us at prayers. I believe you must know my daughter—Matilda ? "

It was strange to hear the pastor use such a tone with such a visitor, and stranger still to see the assurance with which Captain Gregson entered the parsonage, where he had never until now set foot.

" Evening, Pastor. Just a moment. That path—pretty tough on a chap who's used—ship's deck as much as I have, d'y' see ? Very kind, I'm sure. Very kind and neighbourly. And this—Miss Matilda, if I may say so bold. . . . Very proud to know you, ma'am. Proud and happy."

He made her his bow, plying a broad straw hat and a billowy handkerchief of tussore silk. She found herself answering him. And presently—most singular thing of all—he had properly ensconced himself by the tall astral lamp like one of the family circle, balancing a Testament on his knee and reading his verse in turn with surprising facility. . . .

Captain Hull Gregson was one of those men apparently preserved in lard, whose shiny, tanned skin seems as impervious as Spanish leather alike to age and to rude usage. But if his years were indeterminate, his eyes were as old as blue pebbles. By those eyes, as by his slow, forceful speech and rare gesture, as by a certain ruthless jut of jaw, was revealed the exploiter, the conquering white that has taken the South Pacific for an ordained possession.

He had led a varied and more or less picturesque career up and down the warm seas. He had been a

copra buyer through black Melanesia in the open days ; had owned his ships and sailed them after labour in the Archipelago with a price on his head and his life in his hand. And now, rich in phosphate shares and plantation partnerships, a sort of comfortable island squire, he had retired to peaceful Wailoa at last as a quiet corner where business was play and the hot roll dropped on time from the breadfruit-tree. So much was said of him, and it was not considered the part either of wisdom or of island etiquette to say much more—nor was much else required to set him in his place. Certainly he might have seemed somewhat out of it now. The type does not pervade the parlours of the missionaries as a rule.

But Captain Gregson turned it off very well. Once he had recovered his breath, and a purplish haze had cleared from his face, he comported himself easily, even impressively, neither belittling nor forcing the social event, the while that Pastor Spener beamed encouragement and smoothed a complacent brow. . . .

" It's like I told you to-day, Pastor. The notion came to me like that—I've been a bad neighbour. There's so few of us marooned here, like. I said to myself—where's the use of being strangers, hey ? Why not get neighbourly with those good folks and help along that good work of faith and righteousness ? Why not, hey——— ? "

He spoke with an effect of heartiness that delighted the Reverend Spener, and that fell on the ear of the Reverend Spener's daughter as hollow as a drum.

" Why not, indeed ? " echoed the pastor.

" So many places you find a kind of feud betwixt the commercial people and the mission people," continued Captain Gregson. " Where's the sense of it ? I believe

in you, Pastor, and your work and your church. Yes, and I feel the need of the church myself, and a chance to visit a fine, respectable home like this. . . . Why shouldn't I have it ? "

Miss Matilda carefully avoided looking toward him, where he sat wedged between the fragile bamboo what-not and the lacquer tabouret, well knowing that she must cross his smouldering gaze and shunning it.

" And perhaps, by the same token, perhaps you might need me too and not know it," he continued. " I've a notion I might be of some service to the cause, d'y' see ? "

" Undeniably, Captain," said the pastor, eagerly. " A man so influential—so experienced as yourself——"

" Could help, hey ? It's what I think myself. I could. Why, even now I'll lay I could tell you matters —things going on right under your nose, so to speak— that you'd hardly dream yourself."

" Among my people ? " asked the pastor, wrinkling.

" Aye. Right among your own people—at least some of the wild ones that you want to be most careful of. They're a devilish bold, sly lot for all their pretty ways—these brown islanders—an astonishing bold lot. You'd hardly believe that now, would you—— ? " His voice dragged fatly. " Would you—Miss Matilda ? "

Taken aback, she could not speak, could scarcely parry the attack with a vague murmur. She feared him. She feared that slow, glowering and dangerous man, whose every word came freighted with obscure and sinister meaning. The instinct dimly aroused by her glimpses of him had leapt to vivid conviction. She knew that he was staring across the room ; staring

avidly at the fresh whiteness of her there, the precise, slim lines of her dress, the curve of her neck, the gleam of her low-parted hair. And it seemed as if he were towering toward her, reaching for her with hot and pudgy hands——

But he had merely risen to take his leave.

" Well, I won't be lingering, Pastor," he said. " Not this time. You stop by my shack to-morrow, and we'll talk further. Maybe I might have some facts that would interest you. What I really came for to-night was to bring a bit of news."

" News ? " blinked the pastor.

" You should go below and look to your chapel," chuckled Gregson. " I minded what you said about new lamps being wanted, d'y' see ? And so I made bold to hang two fine brass lights in the porch there myself—as a gift-offering."

" For us ! For the church—— ? "

" Aye. It's a small thing. But I've noticed myself lately how those lamps were needed." He paused. " That's a plaguy dark place for lurking and loitering —that chapel porch."

He was gone ; the Reverend Spener had returned from escorting him to the step and was still formulating praise and gratitude ; but Miss Matilda had not stirred.

" Matilda—— ! I'm speaking to you. I say—we've been less than just to Captain Gregson, don't you think ? Really, a most hearty, true gentleman. Did I tell you he's settled the difficulty with Jeremiah's Loo off-hand ? Oh, quite. One word from him, and they're asking for a church wedding now. And there are other things I might tell you as well——"

She turned to look full at her father.

"There is one thing I wish you might tell me. What did you bring that man here for?"

The pastor went a pinker shade.

"I didn't bring him. He came of his own motion. He desired most earnestly to come."

"You gave him permission?"

"I did; after he had explained—after he showed me—Matilda. . . . The short of it is, we've wronged Captain Gregson. You have heard that he used to live with a native girl on Napuka?"

"Everybody has heard it."

"Well," said the pastor, solemnly, "he was married to that girl. I've seen the certificate—quite regular—signed by the Moravian missionary. There were no children, and also—and also, my dear, he is now free. He received word by yesterday's schooner of the death of—er—Mrs. Gregson. You see?"

"Ah——!" breathed Miss Matilda, who did indeed begin to see.

He laid a hand on her arm and gave way at last to a paternal quaver. "Matilda, my child—for you are still a child in many things—I have taken anxious thought for you of late. Very anxious thought. You must trust me, my dear. Trust me to do the best for your welfare—and happiness too—as always. Good night! . . ."

He left her a dry kiss and a fervent blessing and they parted; the pastor to write a particularly hopeful mission report, and this child of his—who was, by the way, twenty-nine years old—to keep a last tryst with a lawless and forbidden love. She knew it must be the last. For the previous one, two nights before, had been held in the porch of the chapel—in that same dark

porch so benevolently, so deceitfully endowed by Captain Hull Gregson. . . .

Her own room opened directly on the veranda. She paused only long enough to snatch up a shawl, as she passed through to the far side of the house. Here she could be safe from hostile ears where the mountain torrent ran thundering; safe from prying eyes in the velvet shadows of the passion-vine.

She parted the leaves and hearkened. A soft, thin trilling came up to her from the edge of the guava jungle in the ravine, a mere silver thread of melody against the stream's broad clamour. And then as she leaned farther out, so that her face showed for a moment like a pale blossom in the trellis, Motauri came. He came drifting through the moonlight with a wreath of green about his head, a flower chain over his broad, bare shoulders, clad only in a kilted white *pareu*—the very spirit of youth and strength and joyous, untrammelled freedom, stepped down from the days when Faunus himself walked abroad.

"Hokoolele!" he called gently, and smiled up toward her, the most splendid figure of a man her eyes had ever beheld. "Star" was his name for her, though indeed she was a very wan and shrinking one, and so to lend her courage he sang the crooning native love-song that runs somewhat like this:

"Bosom, here is love for you,
O bosom, cool as night!
How you refresh me as with dew,
Your coolness gives delight!

"Rain is cold upon the hill
And water in the pool;
But, oh, my heart is yearning still
For you, O bosom cool!"

"There is a night thistle blooming up the ravine," he said, "that looks just like the candle-tree you lighted in the church last month. Do you remember, Hokoolele? When I peeped through the window and you were afraid the folk would see me? Ho-ho! Afraid the '*Klistian*' folk would see their bad brother outside? But this is much prettier. . . . Come and see if you can light the thistle."

She kept close to the shadow.

"Are you going to be afraid again?" he asked. "There is no one on the whole mountain to-night. They are all down by the chapel staring at the new lamps and parading themselves along the path. Too great big fireflies by the path! You should see how they shine through the trees. . . ."

He seated himself on the veranda steps and laughed up over the shoulder at her—laughter like a boy's, or like a pagan god's. It was that had tinged and made so live and subtle the fascination he exercised upon her; his unspoiled innocence, his utter, wild simplicity that struck back to the ultimate sources. She could never have felt so toward any of the mission converts, with their woollen shirts and their shoes of ceremony, their hymns and glib, half-comprehended texts; with the fumbling thumb-marks of civilization on their souls. Motauri had never submitted to the first term of the formula. Motauri followed the old first cult of sea and sun, of whispering tree and budding flower. He was the man from the beginning of things, from before Eden; and she who carried in her starved heart the hunger of the first woman—she loved him.

She sank to her knees on the veranda edge above him there and leaned forward with clasped hands to see the soft glow in his deep-lashed eyes, the glint of

his even teeth; to catch the sweet breath of jasmine that always clung about him.

"Motauri—" she said, in the liquid tongue that was as easy to her as her own, "I am afraid. Oh, I am—I am afraid!"

"What should you fear? I have promised nothing shall hurt you. The jungle is my friend."

"It is not that. I fear my father, Motauri—and —and that man—Gregson."

She could see his smile fade in the moonlight. "The trader?" he said. "Very many fear him. But he is only a cheat and an oppressor of poor people with things to sell and to buy. What has the trader to do with you?"

"He knows—I am sure he knows about us," she breathed. "He knows. Even now he may be watching——!"

Hurriedly she told him of the day's strange development, of her father's sudden friendship with the powerful white man and Gregson's crafty, malicious hints.

"I do not know what he means to do, but for you and for me this is the end, Motauri," she said wistfully. "I dare not see you any more—I would not dare. It is not permitted, and I am frightened to think what might happen to you. You must go away quickly." Her timid fingers rested on his close, wavy locks, all crisped and scented with the juice of the wild orange. "It is finished, Motauri," she sighed. "This is the end."

But Motauri's mouth had set, his boyish brows had coiled and firmed, and his glance was bright. He drew closer to her with a little movement.

"This is the end?" he echoed. "Then I know how.

White star of the night—listen to me now, for I have seen how it must end. Yes—I have known this would come. . . .

" Here in Wailoa you behold me one apart, because I do not seek to do as the white men, or kneel in their temple, or make empty outcry to their gods. Here is not my rightful home. But around the coast, two hours' journey, is the little bay of Huapu where dwell some of my people who have never given up their own customs, and there I am truly a high chief, for my fathers used to rule over all the bays. Sweet are the young coco-nuts of Huapu, and the mangoes and the wild plantains of the hillside—sweet and mellow. There in the woods the moss grows deep and soft for a couch, and for shelter are the broad leaves—for hearth the great prostrate tree trunk that holds fire always in its heart. Like mine—white star—like mine!

" Once I would not have ventured, Hokoolele. Once I looked at you from afar, dreaming only of you as one who had dropped from the sky—so different from my kind. But you are my life and the light of my life, and I have touched you and found you real—strange and beautiful, but real—

" Bosom, here is love for you,
O bosom, cool as night!"

He caught her hands in both of his.

" Come with me now, for always. I will take you away to the groves of Huapu. There we will laugh and dance and sing all the day through, and I will bring you water in a fern-leaf and weave you flower chains and climb to pluck you the rarest fruits, and build a nest to keep you safe. There you shall never

be sad any more, or wearied, or lonely—or afraid. Because I will be with you always, always—Hokoolele! Come with me to-night! . . ."

Then the maiden soul of Miss Matilda was torn like a slender, upright palm in the tropic hurricane, for a lover's arm was about her waist and a lover's importunate breath against her cheek, and these things were happening to her for the first time in her life.

"No—no, Motauri!" She struggled inexpertly, fluttering at his touch, bathed in one swift flush. "My father——!" she gasped.

"What does it matter? Your father shall marry us any way he pleases—afterwards. But we will live in Huapu for ever!"

And with a sudden dizzied weakening she saw that this was true and that she had treasured the knowledge for this very moment. Her father would marry them. He would marry them as he married Jeremiah's Loo and the shell-buyer—"and only too thankful." Curious that the conventional fact should have pleaded with the night's spiced fragrance, with the bland weight of the island zephyr on her eyelids, with the vibrant contact of young flesh and the answering madness in her veins. Curious, too, that her dread and loathing of the man Gregson should have urged her the same way. But so they did, reason fusing with desire like spray with wind, and all conspiring to loose her from the firm hold of habit and training.

"We can go now—this minute," Motauri was whispering. "There are boats to be had below on the beach. We can reach Huapu before morning. None shall see us go."

"You forget the path—the people——" She could hardly frame the words with her lips.

"And Gregson's lights on the chapel——!"

But Motauri laughed low for love and pride.

"I do not use a path. Am I a village-dweller to need steps to my feet? The mountain is path enough for me. That way! . . . Straight down to the shore."

"By the ravine?" she cried, stricken. "Impossible! It has never been done. No one can climb down there. It is death!"

"It is life!" With the word he swept her up like a wisp of a thing in his strong arms. "And also I am not 'no one,' but your captor, Hokoolele. I have caught my star from the sky. See—thus is it done!" . . .

Such was the elopement of Miss Matilda, when she left her father's house and her father's faith in very much the same manner as her remote maternal ancestor went about the same sort of affair somewhere back in the Stone Age. And in truth Miss Matilda was living the Stone Age for the half-hour it took Motauri to get them both down the untracked mountain side. How they managed she never afterwards knew. Not that she slept, or fainted, or indulged in any twentieth-century tantrum. But it was all too tense to hold.

Of that descent she retained chiefly a memory of the stream and its voices, now low and urgent, now babbling and chuckling in her ear. At times they groped through its luminous mists, again waded from stone to stone in the current or lowered themselves by its brink among the tangled roots. It hurried them, hid them, showed them the way, set the high pulse for their hearts and the pace for their purpose like an exul-

tant accomplice. Nor did Miss Matilda shrink from its ardour.

Once embarked, she had no further fear. Unguessed forces awoke in her. With the hands that had never handled anything rougher than crewel-work she chose her grip along the tough ladder of looped lianas. As confidently as a creature of the wild she sprang across a gulf, or threw herself to the cliff, or slipped to the man's waiting clasp on the next lower ledge. Massed shadows, shifting patches of moonlight, the glimpsed abyss and silvered sea far down—these held no terrors. Sharp danger and quick recovery, sliding moss and rasping rock, the clutch of thorn and creeper—all the rude intricacies of wet earth and teeming jungle seemed things accepted and accessory. She was tinglingly alive, gloriously alert. This was her wonderful night, the great adventure that somehow fulfilled a profound expectancy of her being.

Only at the chute she could not hope to aid. Motauri meant to find a certain slanted fault beyond the last break that offered like a shelf. If they could reach that, they might clamber under the very spout of the hissing outfall, drenched but comparatively safe, for the rest was no more than a scrubby staircase that bore away leftward to the gentler slopes of the valley and the beach below. He told her his plan, then swung her up again and took the whole task to himself, easing inch by inch down the narrow channel. The water boiled and raved about his knees; she could see the streak of its solid flood ahead, where it straightened for a last rush, where the least misstep must dash them down the glistening runaway into space.

But she would not look ahead. She looked at the dim, adorable face so near her own, at the carven lip,

the quivering, arched nostril, the fine, proud carriage and dauntless glance of her godling. The flash of their eyes met sidelong. With a deep-drawn sigh of content she surrendered herself to him, drew her arms about his neck until she was pillowed on his smooth shoulder. . . .

"Strange there should be no boats at this end," said Motauri.

They paused by the outskirts of the village and peered towards its clustered, ruddy firelights flickering out upon the shore. There was no one abroad on that empty, nebulous expanse, but they could hear stir and laughter among the huts and the shrill wailing of a child.

"It is still too early," he murmured, and led her back to the cover of a thicket.

Miss Matilda was aware of a slackening from the keen excitement and zested peril of their escape. She had a vague feeling that the boat should have been ready to waft them miraculously over star-lit seas.

"How are you going to get one?" she asked.

"Any of these people would lend me a dugout, but I thought merely to take the first at hand."

"I see none."

"No—they are gone. Perhaps the men are fishing on the reef to-night. . . . But that would be strange too," he added, perplexed.

Somehow the delay, the uncertainty, began to weigh upon her like an affront. She missed their wild communion, the high, buoying sense of romance and emprise and impossibilities trampled under foot. She missed the single complicity of the stream and its turbulent heartening. Here were voices too, but these were harsh and displeasing, common human voices. An

odour of cookery and unclean hearths stole greasily down in the air. The fretful child began screaming again and went suddenly silent at a brusque clap. Somebody fell to quarrelling in a muttered monotone.

"What are you going to do?" she demanded.

"It will be better if I go search."

"You will not leave me——!"

"Only for a time. I must find some one who has a boat and borrow it. If there are no others, the trader will lend me his."

"Gregson——?"

"He cannot know what I want of it."

"Motauri," she cried, appalled, "keep away from that man!"

"I have used his boat before," he soothed. "It will be all right. And we must—we must have a boat. Remember where we are. . . ."

She had caught his wrist unwittingly, but now she released it. They stood so for a moment. She was remembering.

"Very well," she said, subdued.

"You will be safe here," he assured her. "Stay close in the brush. Nobody passes this last house. And when I come I will sing a little, very quietly, to let you know. Good-bye, Hokoolele——!"

"Good-bye," she said, with a catch at her throat and a strange foreboding.

Abruptly he had vanished. . . .

How long Miss Matilda crouched in her thicket by the beach of Wailoa she could not have told. It seemed an eternity. The night clouded down, even the stars were veiled. An on-shore breeze whined forlornly across the sands. Her fever had passed. She was

damp, bedraggled, bruised and aching, soiled with mud. The wind sought her out, cut through her limp garments. . . . She waited, shivering.

She was very much alone. She felt helpless beyond anything she had ever experienced, as if the props of life were fallen away. And so they were, for those she had known she had thrust behind and Motauri's magic no longer sustained her. Worse than all was the pressure gathering in her mind, a tide of doubt that she had to deny, like the rising fill in a lock. She dared not let herself think. Still no Motauri.

Benumbed, exhausted, sunk in hebetude, she waited until she could wait no more, until intolerable suspense drove her blindly. She crept through the bush and so came suddenly to the edge of a clearing by a native hut—to see what it was written she should see at that particular moment. . . .

Before the door burned a blink of fire that revealed the dwelling and its tattered alcove of sewn leaves, as if the scene had been set with footlights. It was a very simple little domestic scene. On a fibre mat sprawled a woman. She might have been young, but she was old in the native way, flabby, coarse-grained, with sagging wrinkles, with lustreless hair streaming about her face. A ragged, sleeveless wrapper rendered her precarious service, bulging with flesh. At her side squatted a youngster, an imp of seven it might be, who noisily chewed a stick of sugarcane and spat wide the pith. The woman kept one hand free to admonish him—by his beady eye he required it—and to tend a simmering pot. With the other, tranquilly, she nursed a naked babe.

There was no reticence about that fire light, no possible illusion—and certainly no romance. In grim

fidelity it threw up each bald detail, the cheerful dirt and squalor, the easy poverty, the clutter, the plain, animal, everyday facts of a savage home. It touched the bronze skins with splashes of copper, shone in the woman's vacant, bovine stare and gleamed along the generous swell of her breast. And just there it made a wholly candid display of the central figure in this pantomime—the brown babe. Not so brown as he would be some day, indeed quite softly tinted, but unmistakably Polynesian. A most elemental mite of humanity. A most eloquent interpreter of primordial delights. A fat little rascal, with a bobbing fuzzy poll and squirming limbs. And hungry—so very frankly, so very boisterously hungry——!

Miss Matilda went away from that place.

She had a confused idea of flight, but her feet were rebellious, and before she had taken twenty steps she was lost. Without direction, groping in the darkness, even then by some intuition she kept to the trees and the undergrowth for hiding. That was her only effective impulse—to hide. She could not go on. Under heaven there was no going back. People were awake all about her in the huts. More people would be strolling and skylarking along the chapel path, supposing she could have found it. She had the sole, miserable craving that the earth might open to receive her. And thus it was chance alone that guided her course through the fringe of the village, through garden and sand strip, and that brought her finally, all unseen, to the wall of a large house, to a post, to a slatted gallery aglow with lamps, and to her second discovery. . . .

"Curse your black soul!" a voice was saying, with

heavy, slow brutality, "when I tell you to drink—you drink! D'y' hear?"

"No can do, Mahrster," came the faltering response, in the broken *beche de mer* that is the token of the white man's domination in the islands. "That fella rum taboo 'long me altogether."

"What do I care for your taboo? *Drink!*"

Fell an interval of silence.

"Drink again—drink hearty!"

Captain Hull Gregson sat leaning forward by the side of his living-room table, shoving down the length of it a glass that brimmed and sparkled redly. On his knee, in a fist like a ham, he balanced a black bottle. His jutted jaw took a line with the outthrust arm, with the lowering brow, as if the whole implacable force and will of the man were so projected.

And at the end, facing him, stood Motauri—a different, a sadly different Motauri. A Motauri not in the least the joyous woodland faun in his attitude now. His proud crest was lowered, stripped of its wreath; his magnificent muscles drooped. He stood humbly, with chest collapsed, on shuffling feet, as became an inferior. He drew the back of his hand across his lips and eyed the white man furtively. . . .

"That's better," grunted Gregson, and leaned back to set the bottle on the table amid a litter of odds and ends, books, papers, a revolver, a tarred tiller-rope with a roseknot. "Perhaps that'll loosen your tongue. First time I ever seen your breed hold off the stuff. But then, you're one of these independent lads ain't you? Old chief stock, you call yourself. Plenty with Kanaka, you. . . . Plenty bold, bad fella you—hey?"

"No, Mahrster," said Motauri, deprecating.

Gregson regarded him with a hard smile.

"And now you're going to tell me why you tried to sneak a boat at this hour o' night."

"Me like'm go fish," said Motauri.

"You've said that a dozen times, and it's no better. It don't pass. Go fish? Go soak your black head. What are you up to, hey? Come now—tell."

Motauri made no answer, and the other controlled himself. Behind his dark mask the big trader was under the empire of some powerful emotion. His hands clenched and opened again, trembling a little. His face shone like wet leather. But it was in a tone oddly detached, musing, that he went on.

"You're smart. I don't say a Kanaka can't be smart when he wants to hide anything. He can. I ain't figgered you yet. And that's a mighty healthy thing for you, my boy, d'y' see? Because, if I could once make sure it was you I saw slipping away by the chapel hedge two nights ago, I'd——" A purplish haze suffused his cheek. "I'd dig the heart out of your carcass with my two hands," he ended, very quietly, and hit the table so that it jumped. "Was it?" he roared.

"No-o, Mahrster," said Motauri.

"You lie—blast you—it was!"

"No, Mahrster."

"Was it you that's been hanging around that white fella girl b'long missionary—that's dared lift your dog's eyes to her?"

He crouched like a beast, ferine—all the obscure and diabolic passion of him ready to spring.

"No, Mahrster."

Gregson glared at him steadily.

"What did you want of that boat?"

"Me like'm go fish," said Motauri.

The trader sat back again, plying his billowy silk handkerchief.

"The trouble with me—" he said, reflectively, "I can't believe my own eyes; that's the trouble with me. And how could I believe 'em?" he inquired, with almost a plaintive note. "Such things don't happen. They can't. Why—what kind of a man are you? Black, I believe—leastways brown. And she—*she*——

"A Kanaka. If not you, then another. A Kanaka! To know her, be near her—touch her—play all manner of pretty, cuddlin' tricks around her—to—to kiss her, maybe! To crush her up in his arms——!" The words came away from him hot and slow, from under half-shut eyes. "And I've sat here behind them slats and watched her go by and wished I might crawl where her little feet could walk on me. . . .

"How should one of your sort have the cursed impudence to think of such things? What have you got to do with heaven? Could *you* see anything in that blind-like look sideways—and hair so smooth over the ear? Do you know what level eyebrows and a fullish underlip mean—hey? Do you? A lip like a drop of blood——

"What did you want that boat for?" he cried, in a terrible voice.

"Me like'm go fish," said Motauri.

"I tell you one thing, you don't leave here till I'm sure. There's something rotten going on. I smell it. I'm on the track, and I'll never give up—never give up. Right now I've got the mission path watched by my own men. Nobody gets up or down without my knowing it—to-night or ever. D'y' mind that, before I screw the thumbs off you to make you talk?"

It was then that he heard the slight, sobbing breath

in his gallery, the rattle of his slatted door that brought him to his feet and bounding across the room. Reaching into the darkness he dragged out the eavesdropper —whose poor knees had simply given like paper, whose desperate effort to save herself had thrown her against the jamb and betrayed her—Miss Matilda. . . .

"You——!" said Gregson. "You——!"

He dropped her by the threshold and started away from her with spread fingers and fallen jaw. For a time only the sound of his laboured breathing filled the silence and the three stayed so, the woman collapsed against a chair, Motauri swaying and winking stupidly, and Gregson, struck dumb, incredulous, empurpled at first and then slowly paling. Without a word he spun on his heel, returned to the table and poured himself a drink and tossed it off.

"Respectability!" he said, in the tone of conversation, caught his collar and ripped it loose. "By Heaven!" he cried, and wrung his great hands. "What am I going to do now? What am I going to do?"

His wandering glance lighted on the rope's end on the table-top, and he coiled it in his hand. He began to walk to and fro before them. His face was ghastly, his bloodshot blue eyes were set like jewels. Now he stopped before Motauri and looked him up and down curiously. Laughter took him like a hiccup: laughter not good to hear; but he left off as quickly. He came back and stood over the cowering figure on the floor.

"And you're the thing that was too good for me!"

He let his gaze possess her deliberately, noting each stain and smirch, her disordered dress and loosened hair, and pitiful, staring face.

" Well, you're not too good now," he said, wetting his lips. " No—you're none too good ! You'll marry me to-morrow—and you'll crawl on your knees to have me. And that father of yours—that snivelling old hypocrite—he'll crawl to make the lines, if I choose. . . .

" When I think how I've dreamed of you ! How I've lived through days and nights of perdition, wanting you—you sweet, cold, white saint you—and a devil after all !

" To think how I've schemed and trembled and trembled and waited, afraid to say a word or make a move lest I'd queer any chance. Me—a common trader with a native wife that wouldn't die. And you up there on the hill so prim and fine. A missionary's daughter. Too respectable to touch ! And what are you now—that's been out in the night—— ? "

He whirled around and the maddened, jealous rage and hate rose up in his soul like scum on a dark pool.

" With a nigger ! " he screamed.

All his strength was behind the tiller-rope. It slashed Motauri over the face so that the red welt seemed to spurt. As he lifted his arm to repeat, with a strangled cry Motauri leapt upon him and the rest was fury. They fought baresark, interlocked and silent, spinning from side to side of the room. Gregson had the weight and the thews and the cunning. He kept the other's clutch away from his throat and manœuvred toward the table. As they reeled against it, he put forth a mighty effort, tore off Motauri and hurled him away for an instant—long enough to grab the revolver.

" *Nigger*—I said ! "

But in the very gasp he choked. The weapon,

raised for a chopping, pointblank shot, dropped over his shoulder. He rocked, pressing at his heart, frowned heavily once, and fell crashing forward. . . .

"Hokoolele! Hokoolele! Up and make haste!"

Miss Matilda lifted her face from her hands.

"Let us hurry while there is time," urged Motauri, thickly. "No one has seen or heard us yet. His boat-shed is open. We are safe!"

"Go away from me!" said Miss Matilda.

"What do you say?" he stammered. "Come. Nobody will stop us. Nobody will know anything about us——"

She fended him off with a gesture of instinctive loathing. . . .

"Please go——"

"But you cannot stay here! It would be a very evil thing for you if you were found in this house. It must never be known you were here at all."

"Don't touch me!" That seemed the only important thing.

"Hokoolele—what of the golden chain of love between us? Come with me now!"

"I was mad. I was blind. It is judgment!"

He regarded her sorrowfully, but sternly too.

"You mean you do not want me any more?"

"No—no!" she moaned, in the stupor of horror and despair. And then the brown man, the native, whose blood had been roused by every agency that can stir wild blood to frenzy—by love and shame, by drink, by battle and triumph—then Motauri, the high chief, struck unerringly to the heart of the matter and made his swift decision by his own primitive lights. Recovering her shawl he wrapped it about her tightly,

caught her up once more willy-nilly in his arms and bore her away from that sinister place by force. . . .

She was lying on a bench in the veranda of her father's house and her father himself was calling her name, when she came to herself.

" Matilda, I'm speaking to you ! Where are you ? "

He came through the window of her room.

" Gracious me !—have you been sleeping out there ? "

She could only stare at him and down at the twisted shawl about her, for it seemed it must be so, she had only been sleeping—with what dreams !

But his next words showed her the truth.

" Matilda, my dear," he quavered, " you must prepare yourself. Be brave. Something dreadful has happened. One of Captain Gregson's boys has just come up from the village with terrible news. The Captain is dead ! He had some kind of a stroke, it seems—very sudden—all alone at the time. I shall have to hurry right down. And at this hour too, when the woods are so damp ! What a loss, what a loss, Matilda, when I had so hoped——! "

He left her, and it came to her then that she too had hoped and that she too had lost. The mountain stream was singing in her ears, and it seemed threaded with mockery. The moonlight came filtering through the vine, and it was old and cold. Her wonderful night was over. She was safe. Her life would begin again where she had dropped it, in formulated routine, and nobody would ever know—unless Motauri——

Some curious twinge, half fearful, half regretful, drove her to peer through the leaves and to listen for his crooning song.

" Bosom, here is love for you,
O bosom, cool as night ! "

But it did not come. She was to listen for it many times, and it was never to come. Having reached such heights and depths that night, having achieved the impossible and the doubly impossible, going down the stream and climbing it again, Motauri had gone down once more and at last by way of the chute and the outfall. For Motauri was a gentleman of sorts. But perhaps, because he was also a pagan, he had been at some pains before that final descent to enmesh his wrists firmly and helplessly in a knotted tendril from the passion-vine.

THE PRICE OF THE HEAD

THE possessions of Christopher Alexander Pellett were these: his name, which he was always careful to retain intact; a suit of ducks, no longer intact, in which he lived and slept; a continuous thirst for liquor, and a set of red whiskers. Also he had a friend. Now, no man can gain friendship, even among the gentle islands of Polynesia, except by virtue of some quality attaching to him. Strength humour, villainy: he must show some trait by which the friend can catch and hold. How, then, explain the loving devotion lavished upon Christopher Alexander Pellett by Karaki, the company boat boy? This was the mystery at Fufuti.

There was no harm in Pellett. He never quarrelled. He never raised his fist. Apparently he had never learned that a white man's foot, though it wabble ever so, is given him wherewith to kick natives out of the road. He never even cursed any one except himself and the Chinese half-caste who sold him brandy: which was certainly allowable because the brandy was very bad.

On the other hand, there was no perceptible good in him. He had long lost the will to toil, and latterly even the skill to beg. He did not smile, nor dance, nor exhibit any of the amiable eccentricities that sometimes recommend the drunken to a certain toleration.

In any other part of the world he must have passed without a struggle. But some chance had drifted him to the beaches where life is as easy as a song and his particular fate had given him a friend. And so he persisted. That was all. He persisted, a sodden lump of flesh preserved in alcohol. . . .

Karaki, his friend, was a heathen from Bougainville, where some people are smoked and others eaten. Being a black, a Melanesian, he was as much an alien in brown Fufuti as any white. He was a serious, efficient little man with deeply sunken eyes, a great mop of kinky hair, and a complete absence of expression. His tastes were simple. He wore a red cotton kerchief belted around his waist and a brass curtain ring suspended from his nose.

Some powerful chief in his home island had sold Karaki into the service of the trading company for three years, annexing his salary of tobacco and beads in advance. When the time should be accomplished. Karaki would be shipped back to Bougainville, a matter of some eight hundred miles, where he would land no richer than before except in experience. This was the custom. Karaki may have had plans of his own.

It is seldom that one of the black races of the Pacific shows any of the virtues for which subject populations are admired. Fidelity and humility can be exacted from other colours between tan and chocolate. But the black remains the inscrutable savage. His secret heart is his own. Hence the astonishment of Fufuti, which knew the ways of black recruits, when Karaki took the worthless beachcomber to his bosom.

" Hy, you, Johnny," called Moy Jack, the Chinese half-caste. " Better you come catch this fella mahster

b'long you. He fella plenty too much drunk, galow."

Karaki left the shade of the copra shed where he had been waiting an hour or more and came forward to receive the sagging bulk that was thrust out of doors. He took it scientifically by wrist and armpit and swung toward the beach. Moy Jack stood on his threshold watching with cynic interest.

"Hy, you," he said; "what name you make so much bobeley 'long that fella mahster? S'pose you bling me all them fella pearl; me pay you one dam' fella good trade—my word!"

It annoyed Moy Jack that he had to provide the white man with a daily drunk in exchange for the little seed pearls with which Pellett was always flush. He knew where those pearls came from. Karaki did forbidden diving in the lagoon to get them. Moy Jack made a good thing of the traffic, but he could have made a much better thing by trading directly with Karaki for a few sticks of tobacco.

"What name you give that fella mahster all them fella pearl?" demanded Moy Jack offensively. "He plenty too much no good, galow. Close up he die altogether."

Karaki did not reply. He looked at Moy Jack once, and the half-caste trailed off into mutterings. For an instant there showed a strange light in Karaki's dull eyes, like the flat, green flicker of a turning shark glimpsed ten fathoms down. . . .

Karaki bore his charge down the beach to the little thatched shelter of pandanus leaves that was all his home. Tenderly he eased Pellett to a mat, pillowed his head, bathed him with cool water, brushed the filth from his hair and whiskers. Pellett's whiskers were true whiskers, the kind that sprout like the barbels of

a catfish, and they were a glorious coppery, sun-gilt red. Karaki combed them out with a sandalwood comb. Later he sat by with a fan and kept the flies from the bloated face of the drunkard.

It was a little past midday when something brought him scurrying into the open. For weeks he had been studying every weather sign. He knew that the change was due when the south-east trade begins to harden through this flawed belt of calms and cross-winds. And now, as he watched, the sharp shadows began to blur along the sands and a film crept over the face of the sun.

All Fufuti was asleep. The house boys snored in the back veranda. Under his netting the agent dreamed happily of big copra shipments and bonuses. Moy Jack dozed among his bottles. Nobody would have been mad enough to stir abroad in the noon hour of repose : nobody but Karaki, the untamed black, who cared nothing for custom not yet for dreams. The light pad of his steps was lost in the surf drone on the barrier reefs. He flitted to and fro like a wraith. And while Fufuti slept he applied himself to a job for which he had never been hired. . . .

Karaki had long ago ascertained two vital facts : where the key to the trade-room was kept and where the rifles and ammunition were hidden. He opened the trade-room and selected three bolts of turkey red cloth, a few knives, two cases of tobacco, and a fine small axe. There was much else he might have taken as well. But Karaki was a man of simple tastes, and efficient.

With the axe he next forced the rifle chest and removed therefrom one Winchester and a big box of cartridges. With the axe again he broke into the boat-

sheds. Finally with the axe he smashed the bottoms out of the whaleboat and the two cutters so they would be of no use to any one for many days to come. It was really a very handy little axe, a true tomahawk, ground to a shaving edge. Karaki took a workman's pleasure in its keen, deep strokes. It was almost his chief prize.

On the beach lay a big proa, a stout outrigger canoe of the kind Karaki's own people used at Bougainville, so high of prow and stern as to be nearly crescent-shaped. The north-west monsoon of last season had washed it ashore at Fufuti, and Karaki had repaired it, by the agent's own order. This proa he now launched in the lagoon, and aboard of it he stored his loot.

Of supplies he had to make a hasty selection. He took a bag of rice and another of sweet potatoes. He took as many coco-nuts as he could carry in a net in three trips. He took a cask of water and a box of biscuit. And here happened an odd thing.

In his search for the biscuit he came upon the agent's private store of liquor, a dozen bottles of rare Irish whisky. He glanced at them and passed them by. He knew what the stuff was, and he was a savage, a black man. But he passed it by. When Moy Jack heard of that later he remembered what he had seen in Karaki's eyes and ventured the surprising prediction that Karaki would never be taken alive.

When all was ready Karaki went back to his thatch and aroused Christopher Alexander Pellett.

"Hy, mahster, you come 'long me."

Mr. Pellett sat up and looked at him. That is to say, he looked. Whether he saw anything or not belongs among the obscurer questions of psychopathy.

"Too late," said Mr. Pellett profoundly. "This shop is closed. Copy boy! Give all those damned loafers good night. I'm—I'm goin'—bed!"

Whereupon he fell flat on his back.

"Wake up, mahster," insisted Karaki, shaking him. "You too much strong fella sleep. Hy-ah, mahster! Rum! You like'm rum! You catch'm rum any amount—my word! Plenty rum, mahster!"

But even this magic call, which never failed to rouse Pellett from his couch in the mornings, fell now on deaf ears. Pellett had had his skinful, and the fitness of things decreed that he should soak the clock around.

Karaki knelt beside him, pried him up until he could get a shoulder under his middle, and lifted him like a loose bag of meal. Pellett weighed one hundred and fifty pounds; Karaki not much more than a hundred. Yet in some deft coolie fashion of his own the little black man packed his burden, with the feet dragging behind, clear down to the beach. Moreover, he managed to get it aboard the proa. Pellett was half drowned and the proa half swamped. But Karaki managed.

No man saw their departure. Fufuti still dreamed on. Long before the agent awoke to wrath and ruin their queer crescent craft had slipped from the lagoon and faded away on the wings of the trade.

That first day Karaki had all he could do to keep the proa running straight before the wind. Big smoky seas came piling up out of the south-east and would have piled aboard if he had given them the least chance, He was only a heathen who did not know a compass from a degree of latitude. But his forefathers used to people these waters on cockleshell voyages that make

the venture of Columbus look like a rise in a ferry-boat. Karaki bailed with a tin pan and sailed with a mat and steered with a paddle: but he proceeded.

Along about sunrise Mr. Pellett stirred in the bilge and raised a pea-green face. He took one bewildered glance overside at the seething waste and collapsed with a groan. After a decent interval he tried again, but this was an illusion that would not pass, and he twisted around to Karaki sitting crouched and all aglisten with spray in the stern.

"Rum!" he demanded.

Karaki shook his head, and a haunted look crept into Pellett's eyes.

"Take—take away all that stuff," he begged pathetically, pointing at the ocean. . . .

Thereafter for two days he was very, very sick, and he learned how a small boat in any kind of a sea can move forty-seven different ways within one and the same minute. This is no trifling bit of knowledge, as those who have acquired it can tell. It was nearly fatal to Pellett.

On the third day he awoke with a mouth and a stomach of fumed leather and a great weakness, but otherwise in command of his few faculties. The gale had fallen and Karaki was quietly preparing fresh coco-nuts. Pellett quaffed two before he thought to miss the brandy with which his breakfast draught was always laced. But when he remembered the milk choked in his throat.

"Me like'm rum."

"No got'm rum."

Pellett looked forward and aft to windward and to lee. There was a great deal of horizon in sight, but

nothing else. For the first time he was aware of a strangeness in events.

"What name you come so far?" he asked.

"We catch'm one big fella wind," explained Karaki.

Pellett was in no condition to question his statement nor to observe from the careful stocking of the proa that they had not been blown to sea on a casual fishing trip. Pellett had other things to think of. Some of the things were pink and others purple and others were striped like the rainbow in most surprising designs, and all were highly novel and interesting. They came thronging up out of the vasty deep to entertain Christopher Alexander Pellett. Which they did.

You cannot cut off alcohol from a man who has been continuously pickled for two years without results more or less picturesque. These were days when the proa went shouting across the empty southern seas to madrigal and choric song. Tied hand and foot and lashed under a thwart, Pellett raved in the numbers of his innocent youth. It would have been singular hearing had there been any to hear, but there was only Karaki, who did not care for the lesser Cavalier poets and on whom whole pages of "Atalanta in Calydon" were quite wasted. Now and then he threw a dipperful of sea water over the white man, or spread a mat to keep the sun from him, or fed him with coco-nut milk by force. Karaki was a poor audience, but an excellent nurse. Also, he combed Pellett's whiskers twice every day.

They ran into calms. But the trade picked them up again more gently, so that Karaki ventured to make westing, and they fled under skies as bright as polished brass.

My heart is within me
As an ash in the fire;

Whosoever hath seen me
Without lute, without lyre,
Shall sing of me grievous things,
even things that were ill
to desire—

Thus chanted Christopher Alexander Pellett, whose face began to show a little more like flesh and a little less like rotten kelp. . . .

Whenever a fair chance offered Karaki landed on the lee of some one of the tiny islets with which the Santa Cruz region is peppered and would make shift to cook rice and potatoes in the tin dipper. This was risky, for one day the islet proved to be inhabited. Two white men in a cutter came out to stop them. Karaki could not hide his resemblance to a runaway nigger, and he did not try to. But when the cutter approached within fifty yards he suddenly announced himself as a runaway nigger with a gun. He left the cutter sinking and one of the men dead.

"There's a bullet hole alongside me here," said Pellett from under the thwart. "You'd better plug it."

Karaki plugged it and released his passenger, who sat up and began stretching himself with a certain naïve curiosity of his own body.

"So you're real," observed Pellett, staring hard at Karaki. "By George, you *are*, and that's comfort."

He was right. Karaki was very real.

"What side you take'm this fella canoe?"

"Balbi," said Karaki, using the native word for Bougainville.

Pellett whistled. An eight-hundred-mile evasion in an open boat was a considerable undertaking. It enlisted his respect. Moreover, he had just had emphatic proof of the efficiency of this little black man.

"Balbi all some home b'long you?"

"Yes."

"All right, commodore," said Pellett. "Lead on. I don't know why you shipped me for supercargo, but I'll see you through."

Strangely—or perhaps not so strangely—the whole Fufuti interval of his history had been fading from his brain while the poison was ebbing from his tissues. The Christopher Alexander Pellett that emerged was one from earlier years: pretty much of a wreck, it was true, and a feckless, indolent, paltry creature at best, but ordinarily human and rather more than ordinarily intelligent.

He was very feeble at first, but Karaki's diet of coco-nuts and sweet potatoes did wonders for him, and the time came when he could rejoice in the good salt taste of the spray on his lips and forget for hours together the crazy craving for stimulant. They made a strange crew, this pair—simple savage and convalescent drunkard—but there was never any question as to which was in command. That was well seen in the third week when their food began to fail and Pellett noticed that Karaki ate nothing for a whole day.

"See here, this won't do," he cried. "You've given me the last coco-nut and kept none for yourself."

"Me no like'm eat," said Karaki shortly.

Christopher Alexander Pellett pondered many matters in long, idle hours while the rush of foam under the proa and the creek and fling of her outriggers were the only sounds between sea and sky. Sometimes his brow was knotted with pain. It is not always pleasant to be wrenched back into level contact with one's memories. Thoughts are no sweeter company for

having long been drowned. He had met the horrors of delirium. He had now to face the livelier devils of his past. He had fled them before.

But here was no escape of any kind. So he turned and grappled with them and laid them one by one.

When they had been at sea twenty-nine days they had nothing left of their provisions but a little water. Karaki doled it out by moistening a shred of coco-nut husk and giving Pellett the shred to suck. In spite of Pellett's petulant protest, he would take none himself. Again the heathen nursed the derelict, this time through the last stages of thirst, scraping the staves of the cask and feeding him the ultimate drop of moisture on the point of a knife.

On the thirty-sixth day from Fufuti they sighted Choiseul, a great green wall that built up slowly across the west.

Once fairly under its headlands, Karaki might have indulged a certain triumph. He had taken as his target the whole length of the Solomons, some six hundred miles. But to have fetched the broadside of them anywhere in such a craft as the proa through storm and current, without instrument or chart, was distinctly a feat of navigation. Karaki, however, did no celebrating. Instead, he stared long and anxiously over his shoulder into the east.

The wind had been fitful since morning. By noon it was dead calm on a restless, oily sea. A barometer would have told evil tales, but Karaki must have guessed them anyway, for he staggered forward and unstepped the little mast. Then he bound all his cargo securely under the thwarts and put all his remaining strength into the paddle, heading for a small outpost

island where a line of white showed beach. They had been very lucky thus far, but they were still two miles offshore when the first rush of the hurricane caught them.

Karaki himself was reduced to a rattle of bones in a dried skin, and Pellett could scarce lift a hand. But Karaki fought for Pellett among the waves that leaped up like sheets of fire on the reef. Why or how they got through neither could have said. Perhaps because it was written that after drink, illness, madness, and starvation the white man should be saved by the black man again and a last time from ravening waters. When they came ashore on the islet they were both nearly flayed, but they were alive, and Karaki still gripped Pellett's shirt. . . .

For a week they stayed while Pellett fattened on unlimited coco-nut and Karaki tinkered the proa. It had landed in a water-logged tangle, but Karaki's treasures were safe. He got his bearings from a passing native fisherman, and then he knew that *all* his treasures were safe. His home island lay across Bougainville Strait, the stretch of water just beyond.

"Balbi over there?" asked Pellett.

"Yes," said Karaki.

"And a mighty good thing too," cried Pellett heartily. "This is the limit of British authority, old boy. Big fella mahster b'long Beretani stop'm here, no can go that side."

Karaki was quite aware of it. If he feared one thing in the world, he feared the Fiji High Court and its Resident Commissioner for the Southern Solomons, who did sure justice upon all who transgressed in its jurisdiction. Once beyond the strait he might still be liable for the stolen goods and the broken contract.

But never—this was the point—never could he be punished for anything he might choose to do over there in Bougainville.

So Karaki was content.

And so was Christopher Alexander Pellett. His body had been wrung and swept and scoured, and he had downed his devils. Sweet air and sunshine were on his lips and in his heart. His bones were sweet in him. As his vigour returned he swam the lagoon or helped Karaki at the proa. He would spend hours hugging the warm sand or rejoicing in the delicate tracery of some tiny sea-shell, singing softly to himself, while the ground-swell hushed along the beach, savouring life as he never had done.

"Oh, this is good—good!" he said.

Karaki puzzled him. Not that he vexed himself, for a smiling wonder at everything, almost childlike, filled him these days. But he thought of this taciturn savage, how he had capped thankless service with rarest sacrifice. And now that he could consider soberly, the why of it eluded him. Why? Affection? Friendship? It must be so, and he warmed toward the silent little man with the sunken eyes and the expressionless face from which he could never raise a wink.

"Hy, you, Karaki, what name you no laugh all same me? What? You too much fright 'long that fella stuff you steal? Forget it, you old black scamp. If they eer trouble you, I'll square them somehow. By George, I'll say I stole it myself!"

Karaki only grunted and sat down to clean his Winchester with a bit of rag and some drops of oil he had crushed from a dried coco-nut.

"No, that don't reach him either," murmured

Pellett, baffled. "I'd like to know what's going on under that topknot of yours, old chap. You're like Kipling's cat, that walks by himself. God knows I'm not ungrateful. I wish I could show you——"

He sprang up.

"Karaki! Me one big fella 'long you: save? You one big fella friend 'long me: savee? We two dam' big fella friend, my word! . . . What?"

"Yes," said Karaki. No other response. He looked at Pellett and he looked away toward Bougainville. "Yes," he said, "my word," and went on cleaning his gun—the black islander, inscrutable, incomprehensible, an enigma always, and to the end.

The end came two days later at Bougainville.

Under a gorgeous dawn they came into a bay that opened before their prow as with jewelled arms of welcome. The land lay lapped in bright garments like a sleeper half awakened, all flushed and smiling, sensuous, intimate, thrilling with life, breathing warm scents—

These were some of the foolish phrases Pellett babbled to himself as he leaped ashore and ran up on a rocky point to see and to feel and to draw all the charm of the place to himself.

Meanwhile Karaki, that simple and efficient little man, was proceeding methodically about his own affairs. He landed his bolts of cloth, his tobacco, his knives, and the other loot. He landed his box of cartridges and his rifle and his fine tomahawk. The goods were somewhat damaged by sea water, but the weapons had been carefully cleaned and polished. . . .

Pellett was declaiming poetry aloud to the alluring solitude when he was aware of a gentle footfall and

turned, surprised to find Karaki standing just behind him with the rifle at his hip and the axe in his hand.

"Well," said Pellett cheerfully, "what d'you want, old chappie?"

"Me like," said Karaki, while there gleamed in his eyes the strange light that Moy Jack had glimpsed there, like the flicker of a turning shark; "me like'm too much one fella head b'long you!"

"What? Head! Whose—my head?"

"Yes," said Karaki simply.

That was the way of it. That was all the mystery. The savage had fallen enamoured of the head of the beachcomber, and Christopher Alexander Pellett had been betrayed by his fatal red whiskers. In Karaki's country a white man's head, well smoked, is a thing to be desired above wealth, above lands and chiefships fame, and the love of women. In all Karaki's country was no head like the head of Pellett. Therefore Karaki had served to win it with the patience and single faith of a Jacob. For this he had schemed and waited, committed theft and murder, expended sweat and cunning, starved and denied himself, nursed, watched, tended, fed, and saved his man that he might bring the head alive and on the hoof—so to speak—to the spot where he could remove it at leisure and enjoy the fruits of his labour in safety.

Pellett saw all this at a flash, understood it so far as any white could understand: the whole elemental and stupendous simplicity of it. And standing there in his new strength and sanity under the fair promise of the morning, he gave a laugh that pealed across the waters and started the sea birds from their cliffs, the

deep-throated laugh of a man who fathoms and accepts the last great jest.

For finally, by corrected list, the possessions of Christopher Alexander Pellett were these: his name still intact; the ruins of some rusty ducks; his precious red whiskers—and a soul which had been neatly recovered, renewed, refurbished, reanimated, and restored to him by his good friend Karaki.

Thou shouldst die as he dies,
For whom none sheddeth tears;
Filling thine eyes
And fulfilling thine ears
With the brilliance . . . the bloom
and the beauty . . ."

Thus chanted Christopher Alexander Pellett over the waters of the bay, and then whirled, throwing wide his arms:

"Shoot, damn you! It's cheap at the price!"

THE RED MARK

EVEN now nobody can tell his name, though doubtless it was a grand and a proud one. Perhaps you could find it in the files of the Bordeaux press twenty years ago, when they sentenced him to transportation for life for five proved murders. Since then it has been officially forgotten. But the man himself has lived on. He lives and he continues to develop his capabilities—as we are all expected to do here in New Caledonia.

M. de Nou, we call him. He is our only convict official. Ordinarily, you comprehend, our jailers do not admit convicts to the administration. We are citizens, if you like, in this criminal commonwealth. We are the populace of this outlaw colony at the far navel of the earth. We are artisans, workmen, domestics: we are masons, cooks, farmers: we are even landholders and concessionaires—enjoying the high privilege of forced labour, the lofty civic title of cattle in a bull-pen. It is all very philanthropic: but we have not yet risen to fill posts under the Government. Except one of us. He has been raised because they could find no other, convict or free, to perform the peculiar duties of the position. That is M. de Nou. We hate him. There is not a creature of us from Balade to Nouméa, from the nickel mines of Thio to the forests of Baie du Sud, that does not hate and fear him as

some other people hate and fear sin. The very Canaques flee at the whisper of his coming and invoke their own dark gods against this white demon in the flesh. Eight thousand felons bear the thought of him in daily bitterness. We have been thieves, assassins, poisoners : we have been set aside in a sort of infected rubbish-box, the sweepings of the prisons : but the last of us, perishing from thirst, would turn back a cup that had been polluted by the touch of M. de Nou. When M. de Nou comes to die the devil will have to dig a deeper pit. Hell is too good for M. de Nou.

He is the executioner. He operates the guillotine. Not for any pay or profit nor for the rank it gives him : but from choice. It is his capability ! It is the thing he likes to do.

Me, I am even with him. I am even with him against all time. Should it be my fate to pass through his hands some day, should he stand to perform his last dreadful offices for me, still am I even with him. I would grin from under the slide itself and I would say to him—" M. de Nou, I am even with you ! " But I would not tell him now. I would turn silent from those haunted yellow eyes, half-understanding and ravening at me, and I would die content to leave him to his damnation. No, I would not tell ! . . . Only I am telling you, truly so that perhaps this tale may reach some of our friends who have escaped from New Caledonia into the world again. They will remember, and they will rejoice to hear how I evened the score on M. de Nou. Listen :

It was soon after my release from the Collective—when I was considered to be properly chastened by residence in the cells—that I had the ill-luck to meet this individual.

You can see for yourself I was never built for rude labour. But I have a certain deftness of my fingers and perhaps also—well, a certain polish—what ? . . . Monsieur agrees ? Too kind ! Your servant, Monsieur. . . . Anyway, it was quite natural I should find employment with Maître Sergeo, he who keeps the barber shop in the Rue des Fleurs.

Maître Sergeo is a worthy man, a libéré, which means he was formerly a life convict himself, you understand, though since restored to certain rights within the colony limits. Requiring an assistant at his lathery trade he applied to the penitentiary on Ile de Nou.

" Here is a brisk fellow," said the sub-commandant, leading me out like a horse at a fair. " Number 2232. Docile and clever. Condemned for eight years. Having served his Collective with a clear record. If you are ever dull about your place he will sing you the latest operas. He has all the polite accomplishments."

" A duke in trouble," suggested Maître Sergeo, regarding me with his sober twinkle. " What romance ! . . . Perhaps he is the Red Mark himself ! "

Strange he should have said that. Strange, too, that I should have heard the term then and there for the first time in my life. Afterwards I found it common enough, a kind of byword among people who affect to share the inner mysteries of police and crime. And later still I had good reason to remember it.

Meanwhile the sub-commandant was encouraging no unofficial illusions on my account.

" I said nothing about a duke," he returned. " But this is a superior type. He has been a student in his day and even has taken prizes."

" I hope he has not the habit of taking them from

the till," said Maître Sergeo, like a prudent patron. "What was his little affair?"

The sub-commandant consulted my ticket.

"An argument with a knife, it appears. A favourable case. Only his enemy was so ill-conditioned as to die."

"I shall employ him," decided Maître Sergeo. "A man who is handy with a knife should also qualify with a razor."

That is how I came, as Bibi-Ri always said, to be scraping throats instead of cutting them. Myself, I considered the jest rather poor taste and Bibi-Ri a good deal of a chattering monkey. But what would you? Nobody could be angry with that mad fellow. He was privileged.

Also, as it happened, Bibi-Ri himself was my single client on this particular afternoon of which I speak. I recall it with an authentic clearness: one of those days made in paradise for a reproach upon us poor wretches in purgatory: the air sweet and mellow, spiced with tropic blossoms: the sky a blue ravishment: the sunlight tawny in the street outside as if seen through a glass of rich wine.

It was very quiet and peaceful. From the Place des Cocotiers not far away one heard the band discoursing. Those convict musicians were playing *Perle d'Italie,* as I bring to mind: a faded but graceful melody. One could be almost happy at moments like this, forgetting the shameful canvas uniform and the mockery of one's freedom on a leash. I even hummed the tune as I listened and kept the measure with stropping my blade.

I waited for Bibi-Ri. By an amiable conceit he never failed each day to get his chin new razored—

though in truth it resembled nothing so much as a small onion : as I often told him.

" That is no reason why you should peel it, sacred farceur ! " he would sputter. " Please to notice I have only the one skin to my face ! "

But this day he was late. I missed the merry rascal. His hour went by and still he did not come. And then, of a sudden, I spied him.

He was passing among the market stalls on the opposite pave : unmistakable, his quick, spare figure in the jacket tight-buttoned to the chin as he always wore it and the convict's straw hat pulled low on his brow. Bibi-Ri in fact. But he never even glanced to my side. At the pace of a rent collector he hurried by and disappeared. . . . This is singular, I thought. What game has he started now ?

Presently he came hurrying back again, and this trip I discovered he was following a girl. But yes ! A market girl. Only a slip of a thing—I could not see her well—a dainty piece she seemed, supple as a kitten, who threaded her way with a basket on her arm. I caught a flash of bare ankle white as milk, the sheen of her hair, smooth like a raven's wing : and she was gone, with Bibi-Ri at her skirts.

Three times I saw them so, through the drifting chaffering throng.

" The rogue ! " I murmured. " He has found a better amusement than getting himself flayed by me. Evidently ! "

At the very word came a swift clatter of sandals and who should burst into the shop upon me but that same Bibi-Ri. I had a finger lifted to accuse him, but I stopped at sight of his face.

" Dumail ! " he cried. " Hide me ! "

My faith, he took one's breath away.

"Hide me and say nothing!" he implored.

Well, then I thought he was simply up to some of his jokes again. You understand there is no actual hiding in a penal settlement, where we all live in the eye of the police. Nevertheless I obeyed, planted him in my chair, flung a cloth about his neck and slapped on a great mask of lather.

I had him well settled under the razor when a shadow edged across the doorway. Glancing over his shoulder, Bibi-Ri made a jump to rise.

"Animal!" I protested. "Will you take care!"

But I saw him staring with a strange fear.

Just outside by the threshold stood a man, an amazingly tall man, looking in at us. The sunlight descended on him there like the flood of a proscenium and he himself might have seemed a player in some stage burlesque. Yes, one might have smiled at first glimpse of him: a travesty of fashion in his long black redingote and varnished high hat of ancient form which added the touch of caricature to his height. One might have smiled, I say . . . but the smile would have frozen next instant as a ripple freezes on a street puddle.

His face was a moist and shining white, the white of a corpse under the icy spray of the Morgue. He was old, of reverend years, though still straight and strong as a poplar. And with that mouth of painted passion and a great nose curved like a sabre and the glittering tiger eyes in the skull of him—I leave you to imagine any one more appalling.

Close behind him came another: a bandy-legged, squat fellow like a little black spider in attendance.

Even then, before knowing, I shrank from them both. They resembled the bizarre and evil figures of the

Guignol that used to haunt my dreams in childhood. Truly. And the tall one was Polichinelle, the image of a gratuitous and uncomprehended wickedness.

"Well done, hireling," he observed, in the voice of a crow. "Well done indeed! You are something of a craftsman too. A good beginning. And a good subject, who is ripe to have the head shaved from his shoulders, I should think. . . . Pray continue," he said. "Cut again and cut deeper!"

Thereupon I became aware he was addressing me, and with the most pointed, the most sinister interest: and next I found myself still holding the razor over Bibi-Ri's cheek where he had taken an ugly gash. That big devil smiled and chuckled in intimate fashion at my red blade. His eyes shone like topaz. Stupidly I followed their gaze. When I looked up again . . . the two outside were gone.

"Name of God!" I cried. "Who are those?"

Bibi-Ri had fallen back in his chair.

"The vultures!"

Well, I understood fast enough that I had made acquaintance of the terrible M. de Nou. The other would be his aide and familiar, a former Polish anarchist—I had heard—whom even the society of convicts rejected and who bore the fit name: Bombiste. These were the dreaded servants of the guillotine. But now they had passed I was bold at the best: I could mock myself.

"Imbeciles!" I laughed. "To be scared by an old bogey like that! The executioner? So be it. We can curse him and let him go. . . . Though in truth he has a sickly notion of an afternoon call, the lascar! . . . Sit still while I plaster that sliced onion of yours."

But something had come upon Bibi-Ri. For once he gave back no jest.

"The monster has marked me down! You heard him? It is a warning!" At that he started up, all streaky with soap and blood as he was, and must rush away on some errand. And then remembering it would be impossible to run the police limits of Nouméa before dark, collapsed again. "I am lost!"

Figure my amazement.

"But how?" I demanded. "Does your blessed executioner have power to pick his own victims? . . . Does he go about cropping heads, for example, like a man in a flower garden? What can he do to you? . . . Unless perhaps he has come between you and that fair fortune I saw you pursuing so ardently a moment ago."

The way his jaw dropped! As if I had touched the very spring of his destiny.

Now you can guess that I knew perhaps a little—no matter how little—of lawlessness and violence and secret intrigue persisting within this model criminal laboratory of ours. Do you change vice to virtue by transporting it half a world away and bottling it up? A disturbing question. At least if you expect your convicts to work, to aspire, even to marry and to multiply like free men, you must expect them also to covet, to scheme, to quarrel and to sin—again like free men. These facts I had noted without exploring too deeply, you comprehend. But Bibi-Ri was the last I should have credited with a share in their darker meaning.

Only picture this client as I had found him. A nimble rogue: a kind of licensed pest, with a droll face resembling those rubber toys that wink and grimace

between your fingers. True, he had been shipped with the worst of us. But what of that ? One knows these gentlemen the Parisian police : how they cry a wolf and then go out and nab some stray puppy in the street. Bibi-Ri ! One wondered how he had ever earned his sentence.

And yet—and yet there was certainly something about the fellow. In his eyes were depths. Something fateful and despairing. Something, in view of his accustomed mad humour, to make me pitiful and uneasy.

" Look here, my zig," I said. " I have seen too much and not enough. What have you done ? I spy a gay mystery that makes a comedian like you play such a part."

" Perhaps it is the other part I have to play," he returned, with a gleam of his proper spirit. " Perhaps I am playing it at the last gasp of fright—my poor knees clapping like castanets. . . .

" Dumail," he said, " put it this way : Suppose you were within three counted weeks of your final release from this hell of an island. Your little red ticket in hand and the actual ship in harbour that presently should bear you home. Within sight of heaven—you understand. Able to taste it. Able to count the days still left you like so many bars on a red-hot gridiron still to be crossed. Three little weeks, Dumail ! . . . And then your sacred luck offered to trip you up and cheat you again. . . . Rigolo—what ? "

" Very rigolo," I agreed, luring him. " But it seems to me you are borrowing your effects from the martyrdom of the holy St. Laurent."

" Oh, I have a stranger impersonation than that in my repertoire," he flashed. " Conceive, if you can,

that I am also supposed to fill the rôle of a seigneur—and a very noble gentleman, too—in disguise!"

Perched there on a chair with a dirty towel about his neck, his hair in a wisp, smeared like a clown and preaching his gentility, he made a figure completely comic—should I say?—or tragic. Anyway, I gave a gesture of derision that stung him past endurance.

"Dumail!" he broke out. "You laugh? Dumail, will you believe this? There is awaiting me back home at the present moment a heritage of millions. Of millions, I swear to you! Not the treasure of an opium dream, Dumail, but a place ready established among the great and the fortunate. For me: Number Matricule 2232! Life is a gondola, do you see? Luxury, leisure, rank. Beauty. Women. Happiness! Everything a poor lost devil could crave!"

Well, you know, it was a bit too much for me.

"Comedian!" I applauded. "Ah-ah—comedian!"

A sort of fury took him. All else forgotten, he jerked loose the collar of his jacket: made to spread it wide—checked himself and instead drew out from his breast an object for my inspection.

I had view of a miniature: one of those cherubic heads on ivory that relate to the model, perhaps, as a promise relates to a fact in this naughty world. Nevertheless I could trace a sort of semblance to that roguish front as it might have seemed in childhood—all ringlets and innocence, cerulean eye and carmine cheek—the whole encircled by a double row of pearls: Bibi-Ri himself.

"My title deed."

I was impressed. Impossible to deny a richness in this miniature. And while the likeness was thin the pearls were indubitable. Still—

"Blagueur!" I murmured. "Where did you snaffle it?"

Gloomily he regarded me. "You are like the others. Always while I was kicking about the gutters or the jail it was that way. No one would listen. Another of Bibi-Ri's jokes! And I lacked any clue to this trinket: my single poor inheritance. . . . But now—look! These queer signs on the reverse. They have been deciphered. Oh, an unbelievable stroke of chance! Of course I have much to learn. The name of the family. My own true name itself. But at least I am in the way of proof and this time I was going to win! . . . A famished man—a man famished since his birth, Dumail—is set before a boundless feast. Does he joke about that?"

"Perhaps not," I admitted. "Go on."

"But I am showing you what Life means to me!"

"And M. de Nou——?" I reminded him.

He shuddered: his head dropped upon his breast. "M. de Nou—is Death!"

Well, you know, this was all very thrilling for emotion, but as a statement it left something to be desired.

"Answer me," I commanded. "Have you killed any one?"

"No!"

"Is there another sentence hanging over you? Have you some stain on your prison record?"

"None."

"Whom have you wronged?"

"Nobody."

"Then sacred pig! It is only a folly of nerves after all! Just because you expect to cash your millions and swim in champagne at last? . . . Bear up under it, my boy. Stiffen your lip! Faith, you might

be a missing dauphin or even the Red Mark himself—as people say—and still you could meet your luck with a little courage!"

Like a lack on wires Bibi-Ri sprang to his feet.

"True!" he laughed, shrill. "You are right, Dumail. You are the friend in need! . . . Where is that blessed mop, to dry my face at least. So! I'm off. . . . But to-night—what? I owe you something, Dumail: you and your curiosity! To-night you shall come behind the scenes. If you dare. Understood?" He wheeled at the step: his eyes held their old twinkling devilry. "I was a thief before I was ever a gentleman," he said, with his wry grin, "and I can still play that farce to its end—get through and done with it and pull out once for all! . . . You shall see for yourself!"

Thereupon he left me to the haze of bewilderment in which I lived for the rest of the day.

Now you can imagine without much telling that we have ways—we convicts assigned here and there on service—to conduct our own underground affairs in despite authority. Unnecessary to explain these little evasions. Enough to say my client was as good as his word that evening. Enough to say that under misty stars, while the military of the watch were safely watching, Bibi-Ri crept out of town by forbidden paths: and that I crept along with him.

Inland from Nouméa for a wide district is all one checkerboard of gardens and small estates where libérés and convict proprietors—the aristocrats of our settlement—enjoy their snug retreat. Not being a reformed bandit myself, skilled in agriculture and piety, I was strange to this countryside. But Bibi-Ri had the key. I could only tag at his heels through

blind plantations and admire his silence and his speed. Truly, as he said, he was taking me behind the scenes : until at last, in a grove of flamboyants that wrapped the night with darker webbing, he set hand to a door.

For all I knew it could have opened on the Pit itself : but a shaft of light guided me stumbling into a stone-flagged kitchen, low and dim and smoky, in fact as some lesser inferno.

By the hearth a woman turned from tending the kettle to overlook us steadily. She was alone, but my faith she had no need to fear ! Figure to yourself this massive sibyl with a face planned on a mason's square, deep-chiselled and brooding in the flush of firelight. She was like that. Yes, a sibyl in her cave, to whom Bibi-Ri entered gingerly as a cat.

" I am here, Mother Carron," he said.

Then for sure and for the first time I saw where we stood. Mother Carron ! In Nouméa—through all the obscure complex of convict life—no name bore more significance : or less, in the official sense. For she had no number. Consider what that means to a community of jailbirds. The finger of the law had never touched her. Consider how singular in a country of keepers and felons !

She was a free colonist. Her husband, a distinguished housebreaker, had been transported some years before. Whereupon she had had the hardihood—sufficient if you like !—to immigrate, to claim a concession and to have that same husband assigned her as a convict labourer.

Since then she had wielded a curious power. Her size, her tongue, her knowledge of crime and criminals and her contempt of them all—these made her formidable. But also it was whispered that queer

things went on at her plantation under the flamboyant trees: a famous rendezvous where no prying agent ever found a shred of evidence—against her or any one else. Successful escapes had been decided there, they said. And disputes of convict factions that troubled no other court, and even politics of the underworld at home, referred to certain great ones among us. Our inner conclave of transportés—so dread and secret that to be identified a member brings solitary confinement in the black cells—had assembled there to seek her counsel. Had demurred to it and been routed with her broom whisking about their ears, if rumour spoke true. For she was a lady of weighty ways.

Me, I was glad to slip aside unchallenged. I had no desire to linger between that dame and the purpose, whatever it might be, that dwelt in the fixity of her frown. As a spectator I blotted myself in the shadows, to attend the next act of this hidden and sombre drama.

"Monsieur," she began, with an affectation wholly foreign to her rough voice, "I have the felicity to inform you that our beloved Zelie is home from Fonwhary again."

"I knew it," murmured Bibi-Ri.

"She resides at present under this poor roof."

He cast a nervous glance toward the stairway. "I knew that," he said.

"Ah? You know so much? After staying away so long? . . . We began to doubt it."

She came to plant herself before him, and the effect of her politeness was like a bludgeon.

"In that case be kind enough to sit, Monsieur Bibi-Ri. Dear little Monsieur Bibi-Ri, we have missed

you! Be seated. You bring your pockets full of news, it seems."

But it seemed on the other hand, not so. I saw my companion brace himself. Evidently this was his stage-play: the ordeal he had now to meet.

"You must excuse me, Madame. I cannot remain and I have no news. . . . Except that I drop this business on the spot. Like a live coal, Madame!"

His whimsy might have disarmed any other.

"I have done my best with Zelie. Sad! Somehow she fails to perceive any longer my true charm. . . . You had sent me mysterious word, Madame, of some danger to which you said she was drifting. Well—seeing her in the public market to-day I sought to question her: at the least to give her brotherly advice. Madame—she repulsed me. Like that! Would neither talk nor listen. Said we were watched. Said it was not safe.

"Sapristi! . . . You can believe I was ready to quit then and there! But presently I found a better reason—if I needed one, Madame. For casting about, perplexed as I was, of a sudden I recognized—can you guess? Why, the man! The individual you expected to send me against, I imagine. From whom I am supposed to guard her, perhaps! I saw him.

"After that: enough and many thanks!" he laughed, with a catch in his throat. "No place for Bibi! Finished. Rien ne va plus! . . . For who am I to chase any maid so unwilling? And at the same time who am I and what should I be doing—in my present station, Madame—to cross the little harmless fancies of such a personage? . . . It was M. de Nou!" he cried.

Still she made no move.

"And so—Bibi-Ri retires," he concluded, unsteadily, edging for his exit. "I withdraw! You can find some one better fitted. My time is up. My ship sails soon. I will not need to come again, I think. In parting——"

"What!" It was like the break of a banking storm. "What did you sing me there? 'Not come again?' Forty devils! Do you know if you hadn't come to-night in answer to my message I would have had you haled by the leg? . . . Why you two sous' worth! You think to employ your sneaking pick-pocket tricks on me? To decamp with the prize I taught you to use: and pay nothing for it?"

There was incredulity in her wrath: the measure of her rude mastery.

"Before God! Where did you get the courage to try that?" she marvelled. "As if I had not trouble enough already with the other stubborn brat herself. And now you! . . . Have you altogether forgotten that I betrothed you myself to my niece—my own dear sister's child—when she came visiting from the church school at Fonwhary some weeks ago?"

"You said it was so," admitted Bibi-Ri, squirming.

"Good! Then you can wager it was so, my boy. . . . And at that time did you or did you not strike a solemn bargain with me?"

He made no denial.

"You wept—sacred pipe! You called every saint to witness your gratitude. Anything I wanted! Zelie? Of course. You would always be the defence of that precious infant against the taint and the curse of Nouméa!"

He shrugged.

"You swore by your own hope of salvation to save

her—to pluck this pure flower from the dung-hill and marry her the very hour of your release. Your bridal trip should carry her away to France. . . . Are these your words ? "

" I offered to," he retorted. " But Zelie refused even then—you know she did ! And so she has since."

" Fichtre ! You and your offers ! Tell me—from the day you discovered your heritage, have you ever been back to persuade her ? "

He avoided that stern eye.

" There it is, you see ! " She gave an eloquent gesture. " As for her—leave her to me. She is only a stiff-necked little idiot who knows nothing. You should have made up her mind for her. You ! I picked you for that : and you were willing enough before. But straightway : instead : what did you do ? . . . Why you began to swell up over notions of your coming greatness ! That is what happened to you. Shrimp ! Can't I read your soul ?

" Suddenly you found yourself to be a somebody ! Ambition grew in you like a mushroom. Not good enough—Zelie, of New Caledonia ! She might handicap you in your fine career. You beheld a glorious future that had no place for her. But who opened that prospect ? Cré tonnerre ! Who sold it you ? Who deciphered the miniature ? Who but I ?

" And now at last, when the girl falls in deadly peril —as much through pique as through mere blindness, be sure of it !—when I call you to redeem your pledge and protect her : you quit ! You ' withdraw ' ! You decide to use your new airs and graces and pull your feet out of the wet ! Because you prefer the excuse of a coward to that of a traitor—Monsieur, is that it ? "

Her fist hit the table like a sledge.

"Faineant! . . . Unless you brand yourself as shamefully as any Red Mark that ever lived. . . . Sit down!"

He had been sidling, bit by bit: he had taken himself almost to the door-sill: but under that tone of thunder—under that sudden amazing and cryptic jibe—he started, he faltered, he obeyed. She bulked above him and it was about this time I began truly to be sorry for my harlequin friend.

It was plain enough by this time, you understand, that I was witnessing one of those obscure human tangles which ravel themselves in the depths of a penal society. Possible nowhere else, I suppose. Yet its threads were the passions and its centre was the heart: and poor Bibi-Ri no poorer hero than you or I or any of us might prove. At this point he had fallen back to his defence: sullen, awed, but also intently curious of her. How she expected to force him to her design I could not guess. But breathlessly I watched while she wove about him and about.

Back by the hearth she stood meditative for a space in silence: a dim presence in that room where the kettle hissed and gave off its vapours—of brewing fates, perhaps.

"Give me a man if he be a bad one. A man who can stand to his game two days on end—how do they put it: those savants?—'developing his capabilities.' Ah! Not like these others. Waffles! Half-baked. Mixed with small impulses good and evil. Let him be saint or devil, so he develop that capability. Let me see him anyway stand to it! . . . As I have seen a few:

"I remember many years ago at the prison of

Mazas," she went on, as if in casual retrospect, "they kept a certain famous captive. Myself, I was never a resident there—no, thanks!—I prefer the comforts of honesty. But my one sister, now dead, she was beginning her own silly career about then. She lacked the brains to steer it safe. So for a time she inhabited that same institution. And one day as we met by the visitors' room she pinched my arm to look.

" ' There goes the wickedest man in France,' she said.

" Down the courtyard came a dozen of gendarmes parading a prisoner. That was a devil—if you like! That was a type—for example. Tall and fierce and unbeaten, with the eyes of a tiger. Once to see him was never to forget him again. . . . While he was still newly-caught they had always to guard him that way lest he slay some one with his manacled fists.

" He belonged to the very oldest stock of the South, it appeared: the old high noblesse. And was he rich? And proud? You can believe it. But also he was a great criminal such as walks the earth every while or so to remind us after all how short a journey it is to hell. A true devil. My sister knew him. She had been a servant in the household. She knew his whole story—which soon was hushed, I can tell you: a scandal too black to publish."

Her voice rose a rumbling note under the vault.

" Messieurs, never mind the rest of the tale at present. But inquire only this: Did they slay him? Did they give him his deserts? . . . Oh, naturally not—else where is the use of Nouméa! We must suppose those savants were glad of the specimen. ' The wickedest man '—do you see? And as for him: he was strong. And cunning to seize his opportunities,

And above all true to his own devilment. So he won reprieve, Messieurs. They preserved him. They shipped him out to this tropic forcing house of ours—to let him keep on developing! . . . And he has. He does. My faith! With the approval of the Administration. With all kinds of special privileges and gratifications!"

She moved from the shadow again.

"Why do you tell me this?" demanded Bibi-Ri, hoarsely.

"For your instruction, Bibi-Ri," she returned, with her tone of intolerable significance. "To show you how one man stood to it. Admirable—eh? . . . A moment ago you spoke of his 'harmless fancies.' Well: he gluts them. He gets what he wants. A fancy of pride? Behold him in his black coat and his lofty office! A fancy for blood? From time to time he stands to spill it publicly on the scaffold! A fancy for young and innocent flesh—a solace to his old age? . . . Do you imagine he would be balked of that? Or rather are you prepared to hear how—with official permission and even the clerical benediction—how he manages to bedevil and to win the particular young girl of his choice?"

In hammer blows she planted each phrase.

"How this same man has let no grass grow under his feet in his little rivalry with yourself, Bibi-Ri!"

She spared him nothing.

"How, having desired your Zelie without 'ifs' or 'buts' he found means to make his purpose good, Bibi-Ri!"

He could only gape at her.

"How he followed her to Fonwhary: how he followed her back: how he missed no trick of persuad-

ing and persisting! how he finally forced her consent like any true lover in this very house this morning!"

"It is not possible!" gasped Bibi-Ri.

"Eh? It is true of true!" she trumpeted. "Name of God! where do you think you are? This is Nouméa! . . . Let her pass for a fool—half-mad with bitterness and chagrin though she be—and still you must admit it is not every poor orphan who gets such a chance hereabouts. What? To occupy a little manor outside the prison grounds. To enjoy the little benefits of official standing. To wear the pretty trifles of jewellery, the rings and keepsakes and lockets, that fall to the master's share every time he strikes off a lucky head. . . . Dieu! . . . Can you picture to yourself the home-coming at that menage after a day's honest labour? To be sure, she might require him first to wash his hands for fear of spoiling her new gown! But these stains of the trade—what do they matter? And so your Zelie, your sweet pigeon, your simple Caledonienne who was all too simple for you—whom you cast aside with 'brotherly advice'—she chooses to embrace that ghoul, that hell-hound, that old satyr of all the infamies. . . . To-morrow she weds with M. de Nou!"

In blind distress he stumbled to his feet and shied from her with hands outspread to fend away the monstrous thing. But skilfully she headed him around to the foot of the stairs and brought him face to face with the actual vision descending there.

"Ask her yourself!" . . .

You have seen those figures in a window of old stained glass which leap from the haze of colour as if illumined of themselves. The girl who waited just above us on the step bore that same transparent

loveliness, with all the fleshly promise of my glimpse of her in the market. She wore a single belted garment of some white peasant's stuff, but nothing could have suited better in the sombre light of that place, smoke-blued against smoky walls. In truth it might have seemed the subtlest coquetry to clothe such beauty in the coarsest garb. For she herself was delicate as a bud. Vital and lithe: with a close-set casque of jet hair, mouth like a crushed mulberry against satin, mutinous eyes and chin: the wild, slight, heavy-scented flower of these climes.

There she stood quite coolly: even languidly.

"Visitors?" she inquired, aware of us with impersonal gaze. "I wondered if any would stop to-night. It would be kind of them to come and wish me happiness."

Except that she spoke unsmiling and ignored Bibi-Ri, except for her deathly pallor, she seemed without the least consciousness of a terrible irony. And when my poor friend made some sound in his throat her pure brow clouded a bit: she pouted.

"Have you been making yourself tiresome again with the visitors, Maman? Now, where is the good of that? I wish you would not start fretting with everybody. . . . Yes, I shall be married. Yes, I shall be married to-morrow. By special civil licence and by the priest from La Fóa. There! It is all settled. . . . I hope you can find something more amusing for our guests."

Incredible to see how quiet she was, how composed, how youthfully unstrained. Only when her heavy lids swept over Bibi-Ri and their glances crossed could you detect like electric charges the unacknowledged tension behind.

"Oh, for amusement," chuckled Mother Carron, with a savage humour, "Bibi-Ri is amused: right enough. Sacred stove—yes! . . . Only he says the affair is impossible."

For the first time Zelie regarded him fairly.

"I see no reason why any one should think so. Unless he forgets—as I never do any more—that I am the daughter of convicts."

Ah, there was steel in that girl! What? The way she said it! Very simply. Without rancour, you understand. Letting it bite of itself. Without a quaver from that crisis of despair in which she must have learned to say it. In a flash I knew how the gleaming, soft, full-blooded slip of a creature had stood up against this tremendous aunt of hers. And could stand. And would! . . . And Bibi-Ri: he knew, too. His babbling protest died cold on his lips.

"My convict father married my convict mother in this convict country," she went on, evenly. "I was born here. I must live and die here. I could never look to marry outside—could I? . . . They would say I was tainted. . . . For the rest—well, I have only to please myself, I believe."

And Mother Carron nodded like a grim showman.

"Eh? What do you think of that? A wise infant—eh? Could anything be more just and reasonable?"

And it was so. She was right. It was perfectly just: perfectly reasonable. There you had the stark and appalling fact. For this is Nouméa—as Mother Carron reminded us in good season. This is Nouméa—the Noah's Ark toy of penology. If you expect your convicts to pair off and to breed like free folk, you must expect their children likewise to couple as they can—

or will: free folk themselves. And with whom? Where do you draw the line? What kind of a social formula have you left for the second generation, reared in an outdoor jail? Our wise philanthropists who devised the experiment: I wonder if they ever thought so far ahead. They should have been interested in Zelie—the perfect product.

Meanwhile there remained my companion—Bibi-Ri. Poor Bibi-Ri. . . . Whatever had passed between him and that unhappy deluded child I could not know, you comprehend—in truth I never did know. But they must have been very close at one time: those two: before his grand ambition nipped him. He was suffering. He writhed. Nevertheless I saw it was going to make no difference with him. . . . Not now. Not this late along. I sensed his effort. I heard him draw his breath sharp like a man who plucks the barb from the wound.

"One moment, Madame!" He avoided Zelie. In abrupt and flurried speech he addressed himself to Mother Carron. "A moment, Madame—I beg. This is mere madness. And painful. And unnecessary. . . . There is still one easy way out for her, you know—for Zelie, for me, for everybody. Still a way."

She unbent to him all at once as to a prodigal son.

"Tiens!" she cried. "You have perceived it?"

"I have remembered. I intended not to tell you: to let it come of itself. And truly—you drove it somewhat out of mind. But now——"

"At last!"

"If we can only get Zelie to listen——"

"Ha! Just look at her there!"

"It fits the need."

"She never had but one, my boy—to hear you speak out once like this: as if you meant it."

"And besides," he stammered, "it should cancel any—any obligations you might still hold against me, myself."

"Parbleu! I should hope so!"

He laboured on, with a kind of desperate snuffle.

"At the end, Madame, we can always turn for aid to the Church—the patient friend of us all. . . . This afternoon—uneasy about Zelie, I confess, and thinking a decisive step would be best for every one—this very afternoon I took myself to St. Gregory's and there I saw——"

"Bibi-Ri, in a moment I shall kiss you!"

"For God's sake let me speak, Madame! . . . I saw the Directress of the Order of St. Joseph of Cluny. She heard me readily. You know—these good nuns—how they rescue any they can of the children of Nouméa. . . . Well, I arranged it. . . . To-night a travelling sister will visit you here. By great luck she is returning home very soon. If the dispositions are favourable she has promised to take Zelie at once, to guard her and to see her safe—passage free—to France, where refuge and the consolations of religion, Madame, await her!"

In the silence that dropped you should have seen Mother Carron.

"Refuge!" she began, empurpled. "What is the fellow talking about? Conso—— . . Look here. Do you mean a convent?"

"Of course, Madame."

"A convent! In truth? Is this all you have to offer?"

"Yes, Madame."

She flung up her arms.

"Faith of God! You dare to make me ridicule like that? Animal low of ceiling! . . . But no, I tell you, but no! It is too much. My turn now. Listen to me, both. Listen to my plan! . . . To-day I also went to St. Gregory's: do you hear? I also sought the aid of Holy Church, which never refuses in the cause of morality—Heaven be praised!—to perform a convict marriage where it can. I also obtained help. That good Father Anselm: he also promised. He also is coming here to-night! . . . And word of honour, I hope to be turned into a pepper-mill if I don't have him marry the two of you on the spot!"

One and the other, she challenged them.

"You think not; you wilful imp?" she roared. "I tell you it shall be so! . . . And you, Bibi-Ri—you grin in that sickly fashion? Wait, my gar: I'm not done with you yet! Thousand thunders!—in another minute you will be crawling at the crook of my finger. . . . Attend!"

And looming on us there, gigantic in the firelight like some ancient fury, she launched her climax.

"You recall that tale I started for your benefit? Well, there is more of it. I told you my sister knew all the story of 'the wickedest man'? Well, there was one thing she did not know and would have given much to hook up—like many another blackmailer, then and since. . . . Note! . . . From the murderous purpose with which that fiend pursued all in his power—wife, family, associates—it appears he spared a single victim. The creature, indeed, in whom he centred his whole affection—to call it so—his hateful pride, at least. A single one he set aside. But only to be the instrument of a last defiance.

" Brought to exposure, his course run out : what do you suppose he did ? Why, he took measures to conceal that remaining heir of his house beyond recovery. . . . He put away that son. He lost him ! Completely. In space : in the world : in the crowd and the gutter. Where none should ever find him again—as none ever did, for all the rewards and all the police.

" Such cleverness—eh ? Such logic ! For observe. . . . They dared pass no death sentence while there appeared any chance of extracting his secret. A vast estate was waiting on the person of that child—one of the finest fortunes in France : the heritage of a golden line. He kept it waiting. At a stroke he saved himself before the judges : he hid away the only treasure he loved : he prolonged his own evil destiny through this unknown seed of his planted somewhere in the mud ! "

Her regard flamed on Bibi-Ri.

" Unknown—my little dears. Unknown ever since ! . . . Though it is said Heaven itself had set its seal on that race for a warning and a symbol : though the child himself was marked from birth : was marked about the neck—so the legend goes—with a thin red line like the print of a noose or the trace of strangling fingers ! "

Bibi-Ri had propped himself by the table, one hand clutching the close collar of his jacket.

" How—how could you guess. . . . ! "

" Ah-ah ! Now will you try to throw us over ? Not so easily—eh ? Now, don't you think you still have need of us ? Until the depositions are made, at least ? . . . Sac à papier ! The very instant you showed me that old miniature and the initial it

bears—I knew you, my boy! I could have read you your whole fortune then: only I saved the best of it for a wedding present! And for sure, I never expected you to try a bolt. A droll of an idea—that! To run away from your chief witness? . . . Why, stupid one!" She broke off to drop him a little mocking curtsy. "Monsieur the Duke! . . . It was my own sister had the honour to be Your Grace's nurse!"

He was trembling. "Tell me the name of that family!"

"But certainly, my lad. . . . After you are married!"

"Don't torture me! Tell me the name of that man."

"But certainly, my love. . . . It is M. de Nou!"

Strange how like a sinister refrain that title—that word—ran and recurred throughout the affair. But this time it had an impact as never before. Credit me! This time it came home to Bibi-Ri: and my little joker absolutely reeled under it.

"Eh?" cried Mother Carron. "Eh? How is your sacred ambition now? Is there any manhood to you? And what are you going to do about it?"

What indeed! She had reduced him to a rag. For this she had played upon a febrile nature, you understand: had battered it, dazzled it, wrung it of emotions: confirming his wildest beliefs: destroying his dearest illusions: tossing his hopes to the stars and smirching them in the mire with the same sweep—that he might have no other will at the end. . . . And therein appeared the triumph of her masterful certitude. For presently, raising his miserable and hunted eyes, he looked at her: he looked for me in the shadow: he did not look at Zelie again—but he looked toward the door. . . .

How easy it might have seemed, after all! Actually in his pocket he carried his release ticket, ready dated. His ship lay in harbour. His sentence expired some few days off. A step would take him into the night. He had simply to keep safe within police limits until the hour of sailing and march himself freely on board. And then . . . he had won! You see? By his theory the world would open before him the most radiant of welcomes. By his faith he would have his lifelong arrears to collect: his gorgeous dreams to realize. One must have been a felon—one must have eaten his heart in prison cells—and even in this widest and farthest of prison cells with its wall of painted horizons none the less alien and inexorable—to feel what those dreams meant to him.

Now again, as before, he had only to get himself off stage: he needed only the boldness to break once for all with the thief's part—as he himself had said: the selfishness to stand to his game—as Mother Carron put it!

And in truth what was hindering him? No actual compulsion: none he need fear. Only impalpable things. Shame. Uncertainty, timidity, regret. The pressures of personality. The qualms of a poor juggler with life: fearful of missing—fearful of not seizing it featly. . . . Cobwebs all!

What he would have done about it the good God can tell. I have asked myself often enough. But he hesitated a bit too long: that little fool of fortune with his face of a rubber puppet squeezed by fate. Next moment the cue had been taken from him, for across the pause ran a thin, keen whistle. Mother Carron spun around. And as if dispatched on that breath—through the keyhole, perhaps—there blew

in suddenly among us from the back of the house somewhere a tiny, grey-faced, white-haired wraith of a man.

"Well—idiot? . . . What's up now?"

From her greeting, as from the blurred effacement of the apparition himself, one divined without trouble the person of that former redoubtable housebreaker: Carron. In a voice scarcely above the singing of the kettle he made his announcement.

"There are two coming by the road."

"Hey?" she bawled. "What two?"

"A priest and another."

Mother Carron smiled the only smile to pass upon her wintry front that night: she spread her hands before us.

"Enfin! What did I tell you? And in great good time, my word! . . . You hear that—you others? . . . Go and welcome Father Anselm, fool! And fetch out the wine, if you are able to stir your pins!"

The shadow sighed.

"It is not Father Anselm."

"Not Father Anselm? . . . Imbecile! Of course it is!"

"It is not Father Anselm."

"Who then—vaurien?"

"It is the fat priest from La Foa."

Impossible to doubt his steadfast whispering.

"La Foa!" she echoed, stricken. "You say? Not truly! . . . La Foa?"

"I saw him."

"And another? What other?"

"We think he is Bombiste."

I can swear that wretched individual never in his

black past had handled a bomb with half the effect his mere nickname produced among us there.

"Bombiste! The executioner's assistant? . . . From Ile de Nou? . . . Here?"

"They are at the gate."

"Thunder of God! . . . And above all, at this time!" She caught his arm. "Delay that priest! Any way and any how: hold him! . . . Confess to him, if nothing else will do—Heaven knows you need it! . . . And let the other through at once. Be quick!"

She banished him like a puff of smoke and we waited in drawn suspense—we four—our eyes on the archway through which this visitant must now appear.

"What can he want?" demanded Mother Carron. "That bloodstained basket robber!"

And Zelie answered her very quietly.

"I suppose he brings me my message from M. de Nou."

You will remember in all my term at Nouméa I had seen but once before this ignoble under-servant of the guillotine. I could have preferred never to see him again. He did not improve on closer view. He was one of those creatures somehow resembling insects: like the ciliate and noxious things that run about when you lift a damp rock. You know? . . . Very black. Very hairy, with hair overlaid in fringes curiously soft and glistening. With eyes very small, round and quick as beads. In person he was misshapen: bandy-legged: but with all that a powerful ruffian, whose crooked arms might have ended in nippers like a scorpion's.

There you have the fellow Bombiste, who presently slid in at the doorway and stood blinking through the light.

We regarded this type: and he us. Did I tell you

he called himself a Pole? I cannot say. But certainly his speech was hardly to be comprehended. He spat something that could have passed equally for a greeting or a curse. And so far he had the advantage of us: for any reply of ours would have been only the half of that.

To do her justice Mother Carron kept a bold front to him. But she was handling here a very different sort of brute—not to be reached by that singular influence she exerted on the convict community at large: himself an outcaste among convicts: sharing the isolation of his detested master on Ile de Nou. When she demanded to know his affair—

"Official!" he snarled back, with his slit grin.

Indeed it must have been a rare errand for him: a rare jest. He affected in his manner a gratified swagger of contempt: natural enough for a man with whom the vilest felon would never willingly speak, you understand: natural enough for one whose only dealing with his fellows was to valet their shorn bodies on the scaffold and to gather their last poor trifles of property for the executioner's wage—"robbing the basket," as we say.

"What are you after?" persisted Mother Carron.

"Not you, old woman!" he retorted. "Not 'any of you," he added with brutal assurance as his glance shifted past Bibi-Ri and myself. "But I come to see . . . Mam'zelle here. And Mam'zelle alone!'

Well, we had had warning, to be sure. From this welter of evil portents some actual horror was due. And my faith, he wasted little time about it! He passed us over as if we had been less than nothing. He removed his ragged straw hat to twirl on his finger. He scraped low before the calm-faced girl who still

waited impassive on the stairs. And then and there he delivered himself of the message he had been taught. All at once. Even glibly. With a kind of damnable sputtering eloquence.

"Mam'zelle Zelie—at your service—I bring you this word from my master: best respects and affections. He bids me say the civil ceremony will be for to-morrow, as planned. But he mistrusts your clever aunt—who might indeed try tricks to interfere. And so . . . you see . . . to-night: straightway: will be the wedding, Mam'zelle!

"The priest is here. In me behold one happy witness! For the other—" He grinned. "Perhaps Madame Carron will do." He thrust a thumb at Bibi-Ri. "Or that young buck yonder. The master himself only delays his impatience a few moments formally to arrive when all is ready. Safely escorted, you can believe, in this place of so bad a reputation—from which, moreover, he promises to remove you at once."

To see the rascal strut, and what airs he took!

"Meantime, Mam'zelle—in attending—please will you put on your best frock and prepare yourself," he concluded. "And as your wedding gift . . . the master has pleasure to send you herewith the precious chains and jewels in this box and asks you to wear them for his sake!"

Throughout this stupefying recital none of the rest of us stirred, you will conceive. And when he had done we could still only stare. A picture, if you like! Zelie, the unfortunate child: and there, distorting himself in gallant gesture, offering tribute, that foul ambassador! The glow of fallen embers in the fire smudged him with infernal fantasy—it lent her the softest flush, making her young beauty to quicken and

to kindle. As if a guilty angel should stoop from the lower step of heaven to take a bribe of hell. For she assented: make no mistake. . . . She was going to assent. He tendered her a small black box of leather: she had a hand outstretched to it—when a word dropped sheer and arresting in the silence as a pebble in a well.

It was not Mother Carron who spoke: our crafty hostess was far too burdened just then under the collapse of all her craftiness. Decidedly it was not me. Remained only Bibi-Ri. And in truth, he it was: though the fact appeared as one of those momentary incredibilities of intercourse.

"Zelie!"

Now I cannot pretend to know what lay in the mind of that young girl. Who could plumb such a depth? She had kept herself inscrutable. How she actually felt toward Bibi-Ri I had no guess. She had seen him pared like a carrot—humiliated as few could be—his little human folly and weakness exposed, his grand hopes and aspirations made sordid and slimy. Even his one effort, his scheme of shuffling her away into a convent which must have seemed the sorriest cowardice, had surprised no motion from her. But how she regarded him now was plain. In the slow lift of her head, the heavy glitter of her eyes—plain to read.

"Zelie," he said. "You can't go on with it."

"No?" she inquired. . . . "No?"

Some way or other he had taken up position between the door and the stairs. . . . Oh, not with any sort of flash heroism—understand me. I am not giving you a feuilleton of melodrama. But there he put himself and there he stayed.

Of course that brute Bombiste had bristled at the

first interruption. With a sign Zelie checked him short. . . . She was ready for Bibi-Ri. She had been waiting for Bibi-Ri. One knew it. One knew this to be their real meeting, and finally one knew who was and who had been his real opponent. Here the issue was joined. Between the dream and the girl—as you might say—here stood the Red Mark.

"You can't go on with it," he repeated in a voice, after all emotions, that had become almost matter of fact. "It is unthinkable. You will not touch those presents."

"I wonder if I won't," she answered.

"They were stolen from dead men——"

"Not so wicked as stealing heart and faith," she said.

"For this crime: worse than murder——"

"Not so bad as killing a soul given into your hand," she said.

"By a man the lowest of assassins!"

"Not so low," she said, "but that you claim his name, his blood and his fortune for your own!"

Ah, they were striking at each other's naked breasts, those two. With naked weapons. And neither of them shirked it. Not the girl, who sent back as good as she got—not Bibi-Ri, who took even that last terrible thrust.

"Such things do not happen." You would have thought he was putting a form of statement. "All else aside—" he said, "all else aside, this does not happen."

"What can you do or say to prevent?" she asked, leading him by so much.

"Anything you want of me."

"I want nothing: it would only be false."

"Anything you want me to say."

"I want to hear nothing: it would only be lies."

"Zelie," he offered, "will you marry me?"

That must have been the test, you know. In the covert, unproclaimed struggle which had brought them both to this pass, that must have been the gauge. Whatever thrill of satisfied passionate resentment she could have wished must have been hers there and then.

"Will you wed with me, Zelie?"

An exultant throb escaped her.

"Too late!" she said.

But he was beyond flinching.

"Let me be sure," he begged. "I was wrong, Zelie. I was blind and mad and heartless. I say so. But I give it up—I give up all that foolish gilded fancy of mine, for I see what true treasure it cost me. . . . Or look—petite—I give it up to you and we go seek the future together. Heaven knows if it could ever be any worth to us after—after to-night. But it's all I have. Zelie . . . take it for my wedding gift!"

She looked him up and she looked him down, long and steadily.

"Comedian!" she said. . . .

Well—it was rather hard. What? To twit that poor player at life with his poor playing. At his last and best not to believe him. At his supreme attempt to throw in his teeth that supreme mockery. Rather hard. In effect!

It left him dumb—and again across the pause, from somewhere outside, cut a shrill, thin whistle. Again came floating in among us, from nowhere at all, the spectral guardian of the gates: Carron. Again from a voice like a piping wind at a keyhole, we heard the news.

" Father Anselm has arrived. He is in the basse-cour, with the other priest. Also two sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny, who came with him."

" Father Anselm ! " echoed Mother Carron, dully, in a sort of groan. " So much for my plan. . . . And the sisters ? . . . So much for Bibi's ! We're all finely cooked, the lot of us ! " But even in disaster she could keep the uses of habit. " Sacred pig, you take your own time ! " she scolded. " Was that your signal ? "

" Not for them," sighed Carron. " We gave no signal for them, seeing who they were. But a carriole is climbing by the road——"

In fact through the heavy tropic night and the open doorway there reached our ears as we hearkened a grind of wheels, the muffled jolting of a cart.

" Two militaires on the driver's seat," continued Carron, unhurried, unvarying. " And inside—another man : man in a black coat. The runner who brought word is not quite sure, but he thinks——"

" Eh ? "

" It is M. de Nou ! "

So once more, to clinch the tragedy, there befell that phrase so often repeated : and this time like the summons of fate, this time invoking the very presence of the monster himself, soon to descend upon us. Bombiste gave an obscene chuckle. He had been wriggling and scowling that last few tense moments in a furious temper at the neglect of himself and his black box. But I think no one else in the room drew breath until Mother Carron, with a remnant of vigour, summed the whole desperate business and spread it in a sweep to Bibi-Ri and cried, as she had cried before—

" What are you going to do about it now ? "

Bibi-Ri fell back three paces to the archway. He

drew the door shut. He swung into place the bar. Then he walked over toward the foot of the stairs.

It had been my share, if you have followed me, to see many curious changes wrought upon my luckless friend during some few hours. It was my fortune at the end to see him himself. Simply. The proper spirit of a man rising to a situation no longer tolerable. Figure to yourself this eager little chap: high-keyed, timid, fervid: something of a buffoon, always a victim of his perceptions. Do you remember that cry of his when he spoke of his coming release? "Able to taste it," he had said. What do you suppose he must have been tasting at this crisis? Such a perceptive, whimsical poor devil! . . . But yet capable of an ultimate gesture as far above bitterness as above rage or despair.

"Why," he said, with his wry smile that I knew so well and from all his little height, "why—since I can't play any other it seems, I have one part left in my repertoire. . . . I can still play the gentleman!"

Deliberately, giving no other warning, he struck from the hand of Bombiste the black leather box—dashed it far away into the fireplace. With an inhuman scream the Pole jumped for his throat. They locked. And the rest was convulsion.

How long it took I cannot tell. Nor yet exactly how it was done. A darkness seemed to descend about them. They fought as it might have been through a gap in time and space: I watched them reeling in a dim immensity. At some point I was aware of a thundering and a hammering from the outer limits. . . . At another I had some idiotic impulse to plunge into the fray myself, to aid my friend. But one glimpse of his face, caught as a blink through the whirl of things,

was quite enough to throw me back out of that.

Himself, he had no fury. I mean none of the heedlessness of a man merely berserk. While they revolved in their course together like a many-limbed polyp, the Pole ravened with a ceaseless and bestial ululation. Bibi-Ri never uttered a sound. Little aid he needed! I swear to you he was still smiling. He kept on smiling with a set and implacable and dreadful pleasantry.

And good reason he had to smile, since that was his humour. For just then by a masterly wrench of wrist over neck he had sent Bombiste's knife spinning from his grip like a red-winged dragonfly. . . . Soon afterward I heard a bone snap. . . . I had forgotten, you see, that while he might be the Red Mark he was not called Bibi-Ri for nothing. I had forgotten that while he might establish his claim to the belated title of a gentleman, for some twenty-odd years of his life he had been acquiring the recondite arts of the Parisian apache!

To say the less of it: by those lights he accomplished the job. In the manner of the voyou and the garrotter. In a merciful obscurity. Between his hands. Between his fingers. With precision and dispatch. He broke that creature Bombiste the way you would break a bread-straw. Until their last smashing fall when the Pole was somehow horribly twisted downward underneath, when his clamour shut off suddenly like a stream at the tap, when he rolled on the floor an inert bundle.

And we were back in the smoky kitchen. . . .

Voices were crying: figures shifting. The barred door seemed ready to crack under assault. One fat and snuffy priest had come chattering like a parrot. One gaunt and iron priest had gone sweeping forward to kneel by the dead and his duty. Two sad-robed

sisters looked on with the placidity of canvas saints. Mother Carron was roaring. Carron himself flitted about with a lantern like a will-o'-the-wisp whose tremulous flare shot the firelight with pallid citrine. It served at least to show the singular tableau at the foot of the stairs where Bibi-Ri had picked himself up.

A gladiator in the arena might have turned to Cæsar, as he turned to the girl on her pedestal. He was stripped to the waist, his jacket in shreds, his compact torso white and gleaming. And there we could see—any one might have seen who knew and was minded—the curious scarlet line of the birthmark about his neck which had shaped his destiny for him to this very moment: the Red Mark.

"Do you believe me now?" asked Bibi-Ri.

Wide-eyed, she stood at gaze.

"Will you believe me now?" asked Bibi-Ri.

As the child in the fairy tale when the ice fell away from about her heart: so with Zelie. The steeled, unnatural restraint dropped from her. The generous, quivering pulse sprang in her veins. She groped: she swayed toward him.

"Bibi—what have you done? Your chance! . . . Fly while you can!"

"Too late," he said, in his turn.

"But the heritage—your great future! Your riches! Your happiness! Nothing counts but that! . . . Name of God, you've lost it!"

"I find this better: to have you think kindly of it once—and of me."

"What else should I think of?". And oh, the impassioned miracle of her voice! ". . . It is your right. You should have it—you must have it, yourself, in freedom, without hindrance! For that I would have

given anything—everything. For that I tried to drive you away!"

"Zelie!" he cried, in wonder. "Is this true? Did you feel so? . . . It was for my sake!"

"What else? . . . Though it tore me: though I died for it! I was not fit for you, but you should have your desire and I could help—a little, however little—to set you on the road. I could free you from danger of Maman—her blackmailing. For always. It was my own hope. But now——! . . . Oh, Bibi! . . . Bibi! . . ."

She must have fallen if he had not caught her. And that was the way of it at long end. She loved him. They loved. The convict and the daughter of convicts: lovers of New Caledonia. With what sombre consummation!

"But you must escape!" she gasped. The knocking at the door was like to splinter the panels. "There may yet be time. . . . The militaires are coming! Be quick!"

He shook his head.

"It will not do, little one," he answered. "Useless. I should only be run down by black trackers. No. For me, it is finished. . . . But I am quite content."

"If you are taken it means death! . . . And mine!"

"No. Not that either. You owe me, perhaps, one promise."

"Anything you want of me!"

"I bind you to it!"

"Anything you want me to say!"

"Then you will not die: and you will save yourself from worse than death the only way still open. . . . These good sisters are waiting here for you. Do you understand?"

"I understand!" she sobbed, through her weeping. "I am yours. . . . I promise! . . . Only kiss me once!"

It was Mother Carron who recovered some sort of sanity first among us. It was Mother Carron who gathered the fainting girl and passed her over to the charge of the nuns; Mother Carron who had forethought to snatch one of Carron's jackets from a hook; Mother Carron, finally, who slipped that jacket on to Bibi-Ri and buttoned it carefully to the chin before she would order the door unbarred.

"Well, well—so we land her in the church after all," observed that remarkable woman briskly, at the last. "Chouette, alors! It is honest, at least. . . . And now, stupid, open up and admit the happy bridegroom and let him see what he can see!"

He saw, right enough. He saw as much as was needful. When the door thrust inward, when his two rogue friends of military surveillants rushed through, when that tall devil in long black redingote and high hat, with his flaming yellow eyes and raging front—when M. de Nou himself, I say, confronted us—there we were properly ranged as the actors in a perfectly obvious police case of brawl and murder: prisoner, witnesses, corpus delicti and the succouring clergy: complete.

"What does this mean?" he demanded.

Bibi-Ri faced him—a strange meeting, in truth!

"Me," he said, with his old trick of whimsy. "Only me. Convict 2232. I've been developing my capabilities a little. . . . That's all!"

* * * * *

So they guillotined Bibi-Ri. In due course, by due process, he passed before the Marine Tribunal, before

the Commandant and the Procurator General and the Director and the rest of our salaried philanthropists. They dealt with him faithfully and on a grey early morning they led him from the little door of the condemned cell. They marched him out with his legs hobbled and his hands tied behind his back; with the chaplain tottering at his side and the bayonets of the guard shining martially file and file: with some of the chiefest of these judges to receive him and some hundreds of us convicts drawn up below to do him honour.

Such was the method of his elevation, you will perceive: such the means by which he attained his ambitions, his uplifted position in the world—when he climbed the scaffold in the courtyard of the central prison on Ile de Nou and took his final look on life.

I was there. For my complicity at Mother Carron's that night and my refusal to testify at the trial they had shipped me back to the Collective. I stood in the front row. I was among those felons whose special privilege is their compulsory attendance at executions. I could miss nothing. Not a word nor a movement. Not the hurried mumbling of the death sentence. Not the ruffling of the drums that covered the fatal preparations. . . . Not even the icy chill to the marrow when we sank there in our ranks on the damp flagstones.

"Convicts: on your knees! Hats off!"

Just as well for me I was allowed to kneel, perhaps. . . . Never mind. . . . It does not bear talking of. Except one thing. One thing I recall to comfort me, as I saw it through a mist of tears, wrung with pity and with awe. And that was Bibi-Ri's last salute to my address before they lashed him on the bascule, under the knife. . . . He smiled at me, the little fellow.

Even gaily. Bidding me note as plain as words how he held fast his good courage, how he had kept his counsel and his great secret in prison and would keep them to the end. How he apprehended and viewed clear-eyed the inconceivable grim jest of the family party there on the scaffold: himself and the executioner!

Then he looked away across the harbour, toward the anchorage, and he did not shift his gaze again from that goal of Nouméa. Taking his farewell, Monsieur. Taking his farewell in spirit and quite content, as he had said, I do believe. For this was the day, this the very morning, when the steamer left Nouméa bearing his beloved Zelie for home. . . .

And one other thing I can tell you, crisp and clear. Do you remember when I began I said I had evened the score against M. de Nou? Evened it for always until that fiend shall be dragged to the nethermost level of hell and earn his reward? Evened it the only way it could be evened on this side of the grave? . . . And so I did. Never was such an evening! Listen:

Ask me not how it was done, by aid of what obscure pressure, through what underground channels. But the miniature—the miniature of Bibi-Ri! You recollect? Somehow, Monsieur—somehow, I say—it found its way into the pannier with the head of Bibi-Ri. Somehow the new assistant, Bombiste's successor, discovered it when he "robbed the basket"—when he stooped to gather the little perquisities of office for his master. And somehow and finally it was laid straightway in the palm of M. de Nou. . . .

He glanced at it. I saw him start. I saw him stare. I saw him stand and stand and still stare. I saw him lose bit by bit that shell of damnable pride,

that prop of untouched and unrelenting hatred and contempt which was and which had been through all his years, his evil support. . . . He gave a movement, of horror, of growing terror. He stepped over. And he looked into the basket at his handiwork still lying there. He looked and he looked. But he could not know. He cannot know. He can never, never know, Monsieur. . . . For the red mark about that severed neck was all one red mark—do you see ?—and the Red Mark remains a mystery for ever !

EAST OF EASTWARD

FEW persons ever attain any precise knowledge of the immemorial East, its ways or its meanings; its wickedness or its mystery. But Tunstal was a young man with a cherubic smile and a plethoric letter of credit, and he had travelled far and wide to Honolulu, to Yokohama, to Macao, and even to Singapore, which is very far indeed, besides being extremely wicked. By the time he had taken passage on the *Lombock* for a tour of the archipelago his education seemed complete. He had just learned to play fantan with much the same skill he was wont to display at poker in more familiar climes.

Tunstal had fallen in with other travelled men on board the *Lombock*, which covers a beat among the lesser ports of Netherlands India. These were simple planters, merchants and traders for the most part, largely Dutch in flavour as well as speed. He thought them pretty dull, but they proved to be good listeners. So he had been instructing them all around, charming their ears with tales of Sago Lane and the Jalan Sultan, of Gay Street and Number Nine and the dances at Kapiolani, the while he banked a bowl of chinking cash as long as any would sit up with him.

That was how he came to find himself alone in the smoking-room one breathless hot morning some days out from Singapore, amid the dead cheroots and the

empty glasses, with a pile of ill-gotten profits before him, a very dry throat, and a great call for swifter action and yet newer worlds. It was all too easy. This globe-trotting thing threatened to become monotonous. . . .

"And not even a drink on tap," he complained, for the virtuous steward—also Dutch—had retired long ago beyond the troubling of a bell-push. "A fellow might just as well be back home with the lid down."

He stumbled out on deck in the dawn that came pouring up from behind the earth like a cloud of luminous, pearly smoke. The *Lombock* had made harbour some time during the night and now lay anchored in a river mouth off the fringe of a toy town —one of those island cities apparently built of matches and cigar boxes that have a thousand years of history behind them and no sense of dignity and not so much as a brick block to support the same.

The water front was a tangle of crazy jetties, of string-tied fishing boats and bird-cage houses, some on stilts and some on floating shingles, to rise and fall with the tide. There stood the inevitable ancient fort, clad in creepers, and there were the usual rows of godowns, lime-washed and naked. A little mosque sprouted from a nest of palms, like a mouldy turnip trying to grow the wrong way. Up along the wooded rise nestled a few solid dwellings, with garden walls and tended terraces. But Tunstal discovered no wonders—nothing to claim a star in any guide-book—and he looked indifferently at that age-old land with its great green, jungled slopes shouldering back and back until they faded in dim blue.

The early stir of little brown men, the raffle of small

craft propelled by pictorial pirates in kilted sarongs, the amphibious urchin who paddled a log and besought a chance to dive for coppers ; the mounting heat, the lifting river mists, the first saffron tinting of the sun, and even the complex and curious odour that wafted overstream, of jasmine and mud flats and ripe fish, of swamps and hearts and the indescribable exhalation of the human forcing-house—he had observed these things before in places quite similar.

Wherefore he yawned in the face of the immemorial East and moved toward the lowered gangway to meet the first mate, a lean and leathery mariner, whom he hailed with boisterous outcry.

" Hallo, chief—you're the very chap I need."

The mate paused to turn his patient, almost mournful regard that seemed never to focus short of the horizon.

" I'm going ashore," announced Mr. Tunstal, " for a taste of local ginger."

" Ginger ? " inquired Nivin.

" Some kind of tropic spice."

" Spice ? "

" I didn't come all this way," explained Tunstal, " to waste my opportunities with a lot of fat koopmans who talk of nothing but calicoes and the rate of exchange. I'm a humble seeker after truth, right enough, but I want it fresh and snappy. I've got the price and, believe me, chief, I've got the appetite. . . . What port is this ? "

Nivin told him. The name does not matter. It might have been one or another about that coast. It meant little to Tunstal beyond the fact that they would lie there till midnight.

" And plenty long enough, by the looks. I'll just collect three thrills and a shock and be back for tiffin.

All I want from you, chief, is the wise tip. Tell me, chief, tell me. Is there anything—you know—anything specially worth seeing hereabouts ? ''

Thus spake and thus queried Alfred Poynter Tunstal, and Nivin examined the figure he made there under the dawn. Quite a pleasing figure. His suit of cream-coloured silk fitted sleekly upon his well-fed person and his tie was a dainty scrap. He carried a dove-grey sun helmet with not more than three yards of bright peacock puggree. His buckskin shoes were fleckless. Also he wore his smile, which requires to be noted. It began in dimples and circled chubbily. A captious eye might have marked it as somewhat lacking—somewhat too round ready, like the ripple on a pan of water. But it was brisk, forward, and perfectly assured.

" Anything worth seeing ? '' repeated Nivin, considering that smile.

The mate had sailed with globe-trotters before, though possibly with none quite duplicating Mr. Tunstal. This man Nivin was one of a type not so rare in outlying lanes and obscure corners as might be thought, into which something of the sun and the air of warm seas has penetrated. A bit of a dreamer, perhaps, mellowed by service under softer skies, among softer races. To such an officer any passenger is apt to become an object of real concern, aside from the strictly professional value thereof. He had overheard Mr. Tunstal's hectic memoirs in the smoking-room and simply, laboriously, he went about to convey a certain warning. . . .

" I should hardly think so—for a gentleman of your experience. The fact is, sir, you're off the travelled track here, so to speak. A town like this has

no use for tourists and provides no class to fatten off the likes. Music, dances—all the giddy frolic made up for a show—they don't lower themselves to that cut o' business."

"Why, they're only natives, aren't they?" asked Tunstal, and the whole philosophy of this kind was rolled in the phrase.

"Only natives, as you say, sir," returned Nivin slowly—"which is Malay and poor to jest with, besides frequently carrying a creese. They're a sober-minded breed, sir. Quite superior and fit for respect in their way."

But Tunstal had been leaning to watch the river traffic, and here he prodded the other to look. Just passing them at the moment came a clumsy proa that had worked upchannel on the last of the tide under sweeps—a singular blot of colour. Alow and aloft, from her tub cut-water and forward-sloping rail to her languid wings of matting, she was grimed an earthy, angry red. Her sailors were smeared with the same stain, their head rags and kilts and their bare arms and knotted fingers at the oars, so that she and they seemed to swim in a sullen, an infernal conflagration, and the sunrise slanting across the river reached picked spar and rope and savage-dyed group with dabs of ruby and vermilion and dull citrine.

"It's a cinnabar boat," said Nivin as they stared down at that silent crew of ensanguined devils.

"From the mines. I know," nodded Tunstal. "Up the river—what? I heard about those mines. Van Goor, that pop-eyed little chap—an agent for some mining company, I believe—he was telling us last night around fourth-drink time. It appears these

mercury miners are imported Kwangsi coolies. About as low a race as crawls, with peculiar customs of their own. They trade with the country people for supplies, and they drive some queer trades. Did you ever happen to hear yourself, chief?"

"There's no lack of tales."

"Maybe, but this is the only real one I got a smell of—pity Van Goor wasn't a bit thirstier. He said a famine has been raging in some coast district or other and the villagers are keen to sell. At the same time the commodity naturally loses weight, through starvation, and the coolie gangs buy by the pound. So a canny village will pool its food to fatten up a few—Ah!"

The ore boat had drawn level with them, so near they might have tossed a biscuit to the rude decks. And there under the break of the poop they saw three women, scarcely more than girls, crouched against the bulkhead. One raised her face for an instant, a face struck out like a pallid, sharp-carven cameo from its ruddy setting—struck out with the poignant, mute intimacy that sometimes springs between craft and craft across a widening gulf. A vivid and unforgettable face!

The head boatman snarled, and the ragged creatures huddled from sight like nestlings under shadow of a hawk, while the proa swept in toward an upper jetty.

"Couldn't ever be proved," muttered Nivin at last.

"Of course not," agreed Tunstal genially. "Who wants to prove it? And anyway the commodity is still in transit—coming in from those coast villages, very likely."

"What would they be doing here?"

" Oh, they probably have a local clearing house for the trade," said Tunstal, learned in wickedness.

" Why should you think so ? "

" Well, observe the commodity again. It hasn't been delivered, has it ? You'll notice it shows no sign of cinnabar—*yet* ! "

The mate's face was stony as he stood gripping the rail, but Tunstal only smiled with the proper cynical detachment of the globe-trotter. From a silver case he drew a fat and sophisticated cigar to adorn that smile.

" And so much for your superior Malay. Chief, I'm surprised at you, trying to string me. Fancy a native how you like, but don't put it on grounds of respect—because I know 'em. I've seen 'em pretty much, and I've no more respect for any coffee-shaded tribe using two legs instead of four than I have for so many monkeys. Monkeys—that's what they are. Apes !

" Play with 'em ? Sure. It's all they're fit for—cute little rascals sometimes too. But they simply have no moral sense. I take 'em as I find 'em ; always ready for any of their cunning little games, you understand. Now here's this burg. I don't expect a complete Arabian Nights' Dream, but I'm dead sure of finding a joint of some kind, and I mean to look it over—the place where the monkeys perform for you."

" I can't help you," said Nivin, tight-lipped. " You may be right—and yet I'd swear these people have never been spoiled. There's so few whites come here. You see, sir, you're pretty far East——"

" Too far for a ' sailor's rest ' ? " laughed Tunstal. " Pshaw ! Come now ; are you going to turn me loose on my own or will you steer me up to the local tropic drink, at least ? "

Nivin might have been seen to wince a trifle, as one sorely tried, and his melancholy gaze sought the shore. Was there or was there not the beginning of a twinkle in the grey depths? He would have denied it—he afterward did deny it.

"A drink?" he murmured. "A drink? Oh, aye, I could name a drink if that would fill your need. Look over yonder on the slope beyond the Government House, that purple blaze. It's a big bachang tree in bloom, and if you should take the path that climbs beside it you might find such entertainment as perhaps you're seeking. Local I believe it is and quite tropic. Keep always to the left till you reach a pair o' green gates—three turns, or it may be four—and mind your footing as you go, sir——"

So this was the way Mr. Tunstal won his wish in the early morning when he came to the garden of Lol Raman, up through the vine-hung hillside alleys from terrace to terrace above that far, that very far Eastern town. He met his first thrill where Ezekiel met his in the vision, within the threshold of the gate. The high wall he had been following gave suddenly under an arch. There were the double green doors, standing open, and he entered a sort of open-air conservatory. At least he had no better word for a place so crammed with colour and scent, and no word at all for the strange flowers and improbable trees that clustered along the walks. Down by the farther end of the enclosure stood a low house almost lost in shrubbery. An arbour with some chairs and tables seemed to invite the passer-by. And just before him, in Buddhistic meditation under a palm, squatted the reception committee of one—a monstrous orang-utan, the true red-haired jungle man, with a face like a hideous black caricature of Death.

Things happened. At sight of a visitor the huge beast reared himself, and sprang abruptly into vehement life, bouncing on bent knuckles. He started out to the limit of his chain until the bright steel links snicked ominously behind him and the leather harness drew taut about his shoulders, pumping and roaring in the great cavern of his chest to top a gale of his own forests. He scurried around the trunk and snatched at something—a packet of leaves. He ran around the other way and retrieved a little lacquer box. Crouching over these treasures with every appearance of the most frantic rage, he began, swiftly and incredibly —to roll cigarettes!

And meanwhile, impassive as a wax manikin, a white-jacketed, white-saronged servitor glided from space somewhere to prepare a table and to offer a chair in the arbour, to set out a square-faced bottle, to pour a glass of golden yellow liquor, and to collect the tiny, fresh cylinders of tobacco which the earnest ape was shedding about him in a shower—all with the gesture of conjuring.

Tunstal sat down hard. He succeeded in lighting one of the cigarettes. Exquisite. He gulped the glass of liquor. Delicious. . . .

"I seem," said Tunstal, mopping his brow—"I seem to have landed as per invoice."

And yet these portents were valid enough too, as Nivin could have told him—the customary welcome at Lol Raman's. For even among the byways a resort must have its features, though it boast no café chantant and hang no battery of conscientious nudes. In the warm, clammy evenings when the fog crept up from the river marshes it was nothing unusual for Lol Raman—whoever or whatever he might be—to

entertain as many as a dozen patrons in his garden on the hill. They gathered about his tables and admired his pet orang-utan, they smoked his cigarettes and more particularly they fortified themselves with his private stock, which was arrack. A very potent safeguard against the seasonal fever is arrack, being country spirit of a golden tint and undisciplined taste. But Lol Raman's owned a private recipe, and hither came the initiated—traders, wanderers, officials of the island government, officers of passing tramps. Here they came, and here they often remained until their friends bore them away again, thoroughly safeguarded to the point of petrifaction.

Nivin might have explained these matters, but he had omitted so to do, and Tunstal's was the sheer delight of discovery.

"*Stengah,*" he observed, reaching for the bottle. "*Manti dooloo!*"

The waxen gentleman looked a trifle more intelligent than an eggplant. Evidently his island Malay was not up to the classical standard. Tunstal tried him in fragmentary Dutch to the same effect and with the same result.

"Damn it—I say I want more and never mind taking that bottle away!"

The manikin's face opened.

"Oh, sure. Three dolla' hap'."

On being paid in Singapore silver he vanished into space once more while Tunstal philosophized.

"Too bad about the simple native that has no use for a tourist!"

The garden had fallen to a drowsy hush. Within its four walls only the great red ape stayed to do the honours, and he had subsided, applying himself seriously

now to the cigarette industry. He sat cross-legged, workmanlike, with a bobbing of his ugly head and a ridiculous curling tongue above the delicate task. Selecting a leaf of the natural weed and adding a pinch for filler, he would somehow twist the spill and nip under the ends with flying fingers. Curious fingers he had—long and black and muscular—sinister talons that yet were nimble enough to trick the eye. It was amazing to watch him. As if a fiend from the pit had been trained to do featherstitch!

Tunstal watched for a time and drank for a time and chuckled like a parrot over sugar. The adventure suited him; it developed well. There was promise in it of something different, something quite local and tropic indeed.

A smooth exhilaration began to crawl through his veins, a heightened sense of power and perception. He found a special charm in each detail about him, each to be separately savoured. The sunlight, he noted, was singularly rich and fluid. The yellow lights in his glass seemed to wink with recondite confidences. A tender spray of vanna showered its tribute of orange stars upon him; some glorious rose-pink rhododendrons drooped seductively toward his shoulder. He reached to reap them, and at that moment—the leaves parted and he saw the girl. . . .

If the event had only transpired a trifle later, as the bard so nearly says, it would never have transpired at all. Two glasses more of the golden arrack, one glass even, and the subsequent proceedings could hardly have interested Mr. Tunstal or anybody else, except possibly Nivin—Nivin, who had laid his innocent plot to that end. So narrow is the margin of trouble! He

should have blinked at the lovely vision and slept peacefully safeguarded beside the square-faced bottle until carried thence aboard the steamer and gone on to tell another globe-trotting yarn. But he was just a snifter short on that potent and undisciplined drink. And here was the girl. . . . "By jing!" breathed Mr. Tunstal.

Truly by any standard East or West, she was very fair. Of her face he marked only the oval, the delicate bisque-tinted skin that shames mere white, and the straight brows, not too broad for a tight-drawn casque of hair. A striped sarong clipped her waist below the jutting front of her little green jacket, and he saw the soft swell at her throat and the fine, free swing of line as she leaned forward, startled, downward-looking. An alluring and timely apparition!

Tunstal thought so—to call it thinking. "You pippin!" he remarked as he pulled himself to his feet by the table. He fumbled at his helmet with some confused notion of beginning gallantly, but it fell from his fingers, and he stood flushed and staring. "You pippin!" he said again.

She belonged in this garden, in the checker of light and shadow and exotic colour, slender like a young bamboo and rounded as a purple passion fruit. She belonged with the whole affair. She was just the thing he had been waiting for. He took an unsteady step, and another. She made no move. She still regarded him as he stayed, swaying. Through the play of sun-threaded foliage she seemed even to smile, provocative, as if to mock him for hesitating on his cue; and at that he lost his head altogether—what was left him. Thrusting aside shrubs and creepers, he reached for her as he had reached to pluck the rhododendron.

"D'you—d'you come seeking me, m'dear?" he stammered fatuously. "Come right along, then, you beauty—and gie's a kiss, won't you?"

He did not do it well—in fact by the time he arrived at the gesture he did it very badly.

Smoking-room audiences that had hung upon the fervid tales of Tunstal, globe-trotter; his fellow passengers, instructed in speed by the same—they must have felt somehow cheated if they could have seen him then. They must have suspected the sad, sad dog, a wolf for theory but a pug for practice, whose snap and dash in outlandish parts had been harmless enough after all. There is a technique to such affairs. Even arrack cannot supply the deficiencies of the amateur—as Tunstal was, and as he presently knew himself to be. . . .

He recognized her. His arms were about the lithe figure, drawing her close when he became aware of the clean-carven cameo face so near him. She was the girl of the cinnabar boat, the girl that had glanced upward from the evil decks. Yet the shock of discovery was not his chief reaction, neither amazement at her presence in the garden and her changed attire. He was looking into her eyes.

They were wide and brown, deep as grotto pools, and strange, with a hint of obliquity alien to him by untold centuries. But he could read—as they blazed into his own—he could read their language. Terror was there and bewilderment. But pride too—pride of soul like the chill purity of mountain peaks. And from that height she feared and loathed him, the brutish creature of another race who dared to lay his defiling and incomprehensible touch upon her.

These things he saw while he stooped, while his lips pressed her bud of a mouth. For he kissed her. After a fashion he did kiss her—though the fume was clearing from his brain as haze lifts on the channel, though he understood how abhorrent was this caress unknown to Orientals—beginning to feel pretty much ashamed of himself. . . . But a bit too late.

The same instant she broke away from his hold, spurning him, and as he reeled a bunch of hairy great fingers closed on the back of his neck.

He screamed once and clutched a stout, hanging creeper and clung there while his cry throttled down to a gasp. Behind him he could hear the click of steel links; before him the sunlight swam. Helpless as a kitten nipped by the scruff, he fought for life.

Because the chain was fastened high and because the beast was yoked between the shoulders he had come within the grip of only one murderous paw, which was mere luck. But through a long moment while his blood beat thick and his eyeballs started from their sockets he knew the agony of those that die by the garrotte. A claw tough as a metal ring dug into his flesh, working for a firmer span, gathering the cords and muscles, tightening slowly. He could only stare at vacancy and dance upon the air and clench the creeper that brought down around him a little snowstorm of flower petals from the quaking branches overhead.

The creeper held. So did not his collar when the eager fingers shifted and found a purchase whereby the half of his coat was stripped like a husk of corn. At the sudden release he lost his footing. . . .

He was like one overtaken in a nightmare, too faint and clogged to will an effective movement for escape.

With safety a matter of inches he floundered on the verge, entangled by vines and grasses, tugging madly at his hip. And the nightmare was very close, a horror not to be faced, a red fury with gigantic arms that came flailing and picking at him and tearing his clothes to ribbons as he grovelled!

It lasted until the ape took a trick from the man, swung up on a looped liana, and from the vantage caught him about the body with his feet. Then Tunstal's revolver came free. Crushed in that dreadful embrace, he began to shoot!

When he stood up above the quivering heap and looked about him he was alone. After the frenzy of his struggle the silence dropped in upon him like a ram. The walks were empty, the thickets were quiet, the house at the end of the enclosure seemed deserted. He turned to the spot where he had seen the girl. She was gone. He turned toward the gates. They had been closed. He ran stumbling and flung against them and found they had been locked as well. No one came, no one called. And the garden drowsed in the warmth of a forenoon brilliant, heavy-scented, tropical!

The last Tunstal remembered was raving back and forth within those four walls with a useless gun in his fist and the pitiless sun beating upon his head.

There is no tradition of the mercantile marine that provides for following the fortunes of travellers who step ashore to enjoy the scenery or other benefits. But a traveller who carries an important letter of credit and a through passage ticket may present something of an exception. In the early evening of the *Lombock's* stay at the port by the river mouth her first mate found time and occasion for a cryptic word with

her captain. And the captain was exceeding wroth, for the *Lombock* would finish her lading on the ebb and he had no mind to miss a tide.

"Who d'y' say? Him? Not back yet, d'y' say? Well, what's that to me? Have I got to drynurse every glorified pup of a globe-trotter that takes a sanctified notion to soak hisself?"

Nivin explained at some length.

"To hell with all passengers!" wished the captain then, a man of strictly professional temper. "Here's this little rat Van Goor been devilin' me all day about the grub we fed his blessed coolies in the 'tween-decks. He says he'll lose a week's labour off the lot before they're fit for work. . . . Well, go on, go on. If your blighter's such a fool as you say, you better go get him. But I'll not wait past midnight—mind that. And I wish you joy of the job."

So Nivin came ashore at dusk to wander through the same streets and alleys to which he had directed another's erring steps at dawn.

He sought a handsome young stranger in a suit of cream-coloured silk and a dove-grey helmet with peacock puggree. Drunk, probably. Even very drunk. Possibly violent and uproarious—this was Nivin's fear. More likely to be fever-proofed and solidified—this was Nivin's hope. Had any seen such a wonder? None had, though a boatman remembered landing the white tuan from the *Lombock*, and there was plain testimony that he had purchased a bottle of arrack for three dollars and a half Singapore silver. Beyond that point the trail evaporated. Apparently the person of Alfred Poynter Tunstal had dissolved in local liquor.

It was the hour of lamp lighting when the mate

arrived at Government House to lay his quest before a genial and elephantine official in white ducks who was by way of being an acquaintance and who beamed upon him from the step. "You los' somebody? Here? My dear fallow, do you sink you are in Calcutta or Kowloon? Nosing happens here to sailormen or whoever. Why, zis is not even semicivilize', wizout one coffee shop! . . . Unless, of course, he actually injuries ze people."

"Ah," said Nivin.

"In zeir pride," added De Haan reflectively.

"And if he did?"

De Haan smoothed a glossy beard with a deliberate hand the size of a spade. He was controller in a district of some tens of thousands of brown population and long had been, and his father before him.

"If he did—I cannot say," he answered. "In such affairs we always remember zese folk haf been alife in ze land a few years before us. Who shall say? But it would be somesing fitting—mos' fitting and op-propriate. Zere was once a man came to steal liddle stone pictures from old temples in ze hills. He wanted ze heads for souvenirs, you see?" He rocked complacently. "I haf seen his head, nicely smoked. Which was alzo a souvenir."

But he met Nivin's melancholy gaze and his tone changed.

"You tell me you los' your frien' at Lol Raman's? Haf you been to look?"

"Three times. There's no trace. I found a servant who sold the lad drink; no more."

"Come wit' me, zen," said the controller. "And do not haf such trouble at heart. We will find him. He is only schleeping off zat fever cure."

They searched high and low, among the terraces and through the water front, where De Haan questioned all manner of natives : stolid, self-possessed little men who looked him between the eyes at answering—but they found no nook wherein Tunstal might be slumbering, nor any clue, and Nivin's lean jaw lengthened.

" Your fren' was come alone ? " asked De Haan, puzzled.

" Alone and early. There wouldn't likely be any other customers at that time. . No witnesses."

" It is all right now—do not be tragic. Nosing of ze kind could be. We will see ze garden again. . . ."

But all they saw was no aid to the case. They entered the garden of Lol Raman to find it disposed as usual, inviting the evening trade. Paper lanterns swung among the trees like phosphorescent fruits and drew a myriad fluttering moths. As if the glow had drawn them too, a few visitors lounged at ease about the tables, sipping and murmuring languidly. Some of the *Lombock's* passengers were there, notably a smallish man with shiny skin and bulbous eyes, glittering and predatory, who bowed effusively to De Haan and received a cool nod. Gliding here and yon, and jiggling a tray to serve the general need, went a waxen-faced manikin. Glasses shone and sparkled. White garments showed fresh and span. And farther back, amid the shadows under the big palm, could be seen the vague figure of the presiding genius of the place, the huge red ape, huddled in the attitude of meditation.

" All ze same, hey ? " said De Haan. " Still we remain a liddle. Perhaps we hear somesing. And you, my dear fallow, drink zis."

He chose a table in the arbour near a magnificent rhododendron and poured a measure of golden yellow

liquid from a ready bottle, and the mate had need of the same. Nivin was paying the penalty just then for unprofessional weakness and the mellower streak of his nature, as those of his type had often to pay here below. He remembered that he alone had guided Tunstal. He could not acquit himself for whatever ill had befallen. And he remembered something else—another evil he had done nothing to check that day—the passage of the cinnabar boat with her ruddy devils and suspected errand. . . .

"What is ze matter wit' zat beast?" rumbled De Haan, frowning over his shoulder. "He don' yell good to-night. He acts like sick. And alzo he haf no' roll' us yet one single cigarette. Yet here is plenty tobacco too——"

With his foot he pushed within the circle of the chain a little lacquer box and a packet of leaves, but when he turned again the kindly official saw that his attempt to set up a diversion had failed. Nivin looked leaner and more leathery than ever, and his eyes had lighted with an almost fanatic gleam which was only partly due to arrack—that potential drink. "It's no use, Mister Controller," he said. "And I thank you for meaning well. But you can't keep from me that something awful has happened to the boy I sent from the *Lombock* so free and careless."

De Haan squirmed through all his thick bulk. "Don't speak so wit' a pain, my dear fallow," he urged. "I do not admit it. We haf yet to see."

"I can see. You try to tell me certain crimes are spared you here. I take it you mean such devilry as grows where foreigners have rotted a native country?"

"Yes," said De Haan.

"And that's true; they do rot it. I always thought

this place was clean, just as you claim, because so few whites pass through—a plain, decent, wholesome race that keeps its self-respect and harms none till trod upon."

"Yes."

Nivin leaned across at him. "But the rotters are in. They're at their slimy work, grubbin' for profit through muck. And after that what's to be trusted?"

"What do you mean?" demanded De Haan.

"Such people as that rat Van Goor over there——" He jerked a thumb toward the bulbous-eyed man.

"We watch zem. Zat is what we are here for. Meanwhile zey bring development. If zey misbehave, we sling zem out quick."

"And the coolies they bring—scum of the earth. Do you watch them?"

"Of course."

"And you never caught them yet at their slave trade planted right in the heart of your people?"

De Haan stiffened in his chair. "What are you trying to say? Zis is fool talk of ze river."

"Native women sold into slavery to the cinnabar mines to hell and death. Soul traffic, the fine flower of civilization. Here in these lovely islands!"

"I tell you it can't be!"

"The boats, man. The cinnabar boats. Can you answer for their trade up and down and about—transporting commodities to supply the gangs?"

"We inspect every one of zem here, at ze water front. Zere is nosing nor anywhere to hide such doings. You, zat speak to the shame of our people—prove it if you can!"

"What if you could?" cried Nivin.

"What if you could?" De Haan doubled his hands before him, the kind of big, white, capable hands that deliberately and quietly have moulded the most successful and the least troublesome colonial empire in the world. "What if you could? By Godd, we would take ze man who did it and break him in liddle pieces! Can you prove it? Speak now and let me hear your proof. By Godd, I tell you zis is my gountry—our gountry, our people! Not dirt, but men and women. Not chattels, not slaves; not—not——"

There broke a sharp click and rattle of steel links. They turned at the sound. Under the big palm the red-haired ape had started into vehement life, bouncing at his leash. . . .

Nivin had fallen back into his chair again, silenced, baffled, for he had no proof to give. De Haan still held the pose of challenge, glancing over his shoulder. Both of them watched the ungainly creature reeling in the shadows; both of them observed the gestures by which he seemed to solicit their attention.

He had taken a leaf of the raw tobacco and adding a pinch for filler was trying to twist the spill. And he could not. It became evident to them that he could not. The fingers moved painfully, trembling. . . . Curious fingers he had, stumpy and thick and clumsy as if covered with ragged gloves, wholly unequal to the delicate task.

Slowly Nivin levered his lank frame out of the chair and moved a pace like a somnambulist and stood staring at those fingers. He straightened and transfixed De Haan. "Where's your police?" he whispered. "Guns—soldiers—something——!"

"What? What is it?"

Nivin stood braced like a man at the edge of a precipice.

"To hold this place."

De Haan looked around over the patch of lighted garden into the banks of shrubbery and further dim tree shapes.

"I hold zis place," he said simply, bulking big and broad. "I am here. None of my people will harm us now, whatever zey may haf done, whatever you may mean. And zen——?"

Without a word Nivin stepped into the circle about the palm, stepped up to the crouching, sinister captive, flung an arm about him and seemed to wrestle. A knife wrought swiftly in his hand with little flashes.

"*N-n-not—not—not monkeys!*" burst a broken voice, sobbing with eagerness to top the phrase.

And in the fantastic glow of paper lanterns stood Alfred Poynter Tunstal, surely the strangest figure to which a dapper and sophisticated seeker after truth was ever reduced, with a face blackened and unrecognizable like a hideous caricature and slashed across by the raw wound of his recent gag, clad, head to heel, in the plastered red hide of a monstrous orang-utan, the true jungle man!

So he stood to give his testimony and make atonement for various things.

"Not monkeys!" he gasped hysterically. "*I* thought so—*I* thought they were—and they made a monkey out of me!"

He swayed and straightened in Nivin's grip.

"I killed their ape. I put the touch of dishonour on a brown skin. And they served me proper for it—proper. But I've got the proof you want. . . .

"All day I've been sitting there, under that tree.

The man—the man who bought those cinnabar girls—he came to talk business.

"It's true. He gets those girls in starving villages. They engage for service; that's all. They don't know—don't understand—till too late. . . . Three of them now in that house back there waiting shipment! Blind victims—an incidental side line to Lol Raman!"

"Who?" thundered De Haan!

A long, hairy arm shot out accusing.

"That greasy little cur over there. Van Goor, the agent. *Stop him!*"

The controller stopped him. "Zis," he observed, "zis is mos' op-propriate!" . . .

And Alfred Poynter Tunstal, recovering as he went, continued his journey eastward as soon and as fast as ever he could make it until East became West again. He brought home few records of his travels, and, curiously, he had not collected a single globe-trotting tale of wickedness and mystery. But one result of his voyaging was marked. He carried a scar—acquired in some slight accident—which ran from each corner of his mouth in a thin line and which transformed his original cheerful chubbiness into an expression quite grim and taciturn. He had lost his cherubic smile.

JETSAM

IT is likely that at some time in his extreme youth Junius Peabody was introduced to those single-minded creatures, the ant and the bee. Doubtless he was instructed in the highly moral lessons they are supposed to illustrate to the inquiring mind of childhood. But it is certain he never profited by the acquaintance—indeed, the contemplation of such tenacious industry must have afflicted his infant consciousness with utter repugnance. By the time he was twenty-seven the only living thing that could be said to have served him as a model was the jellyfish.

Now the jellyfish pursues a most amiable theory of life, being harmless, humorous, and decorative. It derives much enjoyment from drifting along through the glitter and froth, as chance may direct. It does no work to speak of. It never needs to get anywhere. And it never, never has to go thirsty. But some day it may get itself stranded, and then the poor jellyfish becomes an object quite worthless and fit only to be shovelled out of sight as soon as possible—because it lacks the use of its legs.

Thus it was with Junius Peabody, who awoke one morning of his twenty-eighth year on the roaring coral beach at Fufuti below Bendemeer's place to find that all the chances had run out and that the glitter had

faded finally from a prospect as drab as the dawn spread over a butternut sea before him. . . .

Mr. Peabody sat up and looked about from under a corrugated brow and yawned and shivered. His nerves had been reduced to shreds, and even the fiercest heat of tropic suns seemed never to warm him, a symptom familiar enough to brandy drunkards. But he had had such awakenings before, many of them, and the chill that struck through him on this particular morning was worse than any hang-over. It was the soul of Junius Peabody that felt cold and sick, and when he fumbled through his pockets—the subtle relation between the pockets and the soul is a point sadly neglected by our best little psychologists—he uncovered a very definite reason. His last penny was gone.

Under the shock of conviction Mr. Peabody sought to cast up the mental log, in the hope of determining where he was and how he came to be there.

The entries were badly blurred, but he could trace himself down through Port Said, Colombo, Singapore —his recollections here were limited to a woman's face in a balcony and the cloying aroma of anisette. He remembered a stop at Sydney, where he made the remarkable discovery that the Circular Quay was completely circular and could be circumnavigated in a night. After that he had a sketchy impression of the Shanghai race meeting and a mad sort of trip in a private yacht full of Australian sheep-something—kings, perhaps ; tremendous fellows, anyway, of amazing capacity. And then Manila, of course, the place where he hired an ocean-going tug to urge a broken date on the coy ingénue of a travelling Spanish opera company. And then Macao, where he found and lost her again, as coy as ever, together with his wallet.

And after that the hectic session when he and a Norwegian schooner captain hit the bank at fan-tan and swore eternal friendship amid the champagne baskets on the schooner's deck under a complicated moon. It was this same captain who had landed him finally—the baskets having been emptied—at the point of a boot on the strand where now he sat. So much was still quite clear and recent, within a range of days.

Always through the maze of these memoirs ran one consistent and tragic motive—a dwindling letter of credit, the fag-end of his considerable patrimony. It had expired painlessly at last, the night before if he could trust his head, for there had been a noble wake. He recalled the inscrutable face of the tall white man behind the bar who had cashed it for him after a rate of exchange of his own grim devising. And he recalled, too, a waif bit of their conversation as he signed the ultimate coupon.

"You can date it Fufuti," suggested Bendemeer, and spelled the name for him.

"And where—where the devil is Fufuti?" he asked.

"Three thousand miles from the next pub," said Bendemeer, with excessively dry significance.

The phrase came back to him now. . . .

"In that case," decided Junius Peabody, aloud, "—in that case there's no use trying to borrow car fare, and it's too far to walk. I'm stuck."

Some one sniffed beside him, and he turned to stare into a face that might have been a distortion of his own yellow, haggard image.

"Hallo!" he said—and then, by natural sequence, "Say, you don't happen to have a flask anywhere handy about you—what?"

His neighbour scowled aggrievedly.

"Do I *look* like I 'ad a flask?"

The belligerent whine was enough to renew the identity of the mangy little larrikin whose couch on the sand he had shared. The Sydney Duck, they called him: a descriptive title which served as well as any. Junius did not like him very well, but he had lived in his company nearly a week and he had long forgotten to make effective distinctions. Brandy is a great democrat.

"It's my notion I'm going to have the fantods," explained Junius. "I need a bracer."

"My word, I could do with a nip meself just now," agreed Sydney. "'In't y' got no more credit with Bendemeer?"

Peabody made an effort.

"Seems to me I was thrown out of Bendemeer's last night. Is that right?"

"You was, and so was me and that big Dutchman, Willems—all thrown out. But it was your fault. You started playin' chuck farthin' among his bottles with a bunch of copper spikes. . . . I never see a man 'old his liquor worse."

"Well, I paid for it, didn't I!" inquired Junius, without heat. "And I believe you had your share. But what I'm getting at is—if he threw me out the credit must be gone."

This was simple logic and unanswerable. "Maybe y' got something else he'll tyke for th' price," suggested Sydney. "Damn 'im—'e's keen enough to drive a tryde!"

Junius went through the form of searching, but without any great enthusiasm, nor was Sydney himself notably expectant—a fact that might have seemed

to argue a rather sinister familiarity with the probable result.

"I did have some cuff-links and things," said Peabody vaguely. "I wonder what's become of them."

"I wonder," echoed Sydney. As if some last possible claim upon his regard had been dissipated, he let his lips writhe in mockery. "Ah, and that's a pity too. You got to learn now what it means bein' on the beach and doin' *without* drinks—'cept as you kin cadge them off'n 'alf-caste Chinymen and such. You won't like it, you won't."

"Do you?" asked Junius.

"Me? I'm used to it. But, Lord, look at them 'ands! I'll lay you never did a day's work in your life."

"Did you?" inquired Junius Peabody equably.

"Garn!" retorted Sydney with a peculiarly unlovely sneer. "Why, you don't know yet what you've come to, you don't. 'Jaimes, fetch me me mornin' drawft!'—that's your style. Only there 'in't no Jaimes no more, and no drafts to be 'ad. Ho! . . . You're only a beachcomber now, mytey. A lousy beachcomber! And you needn't expect me to do none of your beggin' for you, for I won't—no fear!"

Junius observed him with attention, with rather more attention than he could remember having bestowed upon any specific object for a long time. He examined the features of the Sydney Duck, the undue prominence of nose and upper lip, the singularly sharp ridge of the whole front face—whittled, as it might have been: the thin, pink ears and the jutting teeth that gave him something of the feeble ferocity of a rat. And with new perception he saw the Sydney Duck, not only as an

unpleasant individual but as a type, the fitting comrade and associate for such as he.

"It's a fact," said Junius Peabody; "I've fallen pretty low. . . ."

He looked out again upon that unprofitable dawning. To right and left stretched the flat, dim monotony of the beach, lined in misty surf and hedged with slim palms like a tufted palisade. From behind drifted the smoke from scores of homely hearths. Down by Tenbow Head the first pearling luggers were putting out under silver clouds of sail. Sea and land stirred once more with the accustomed affairs of busy men, but here between land and sea was the fringe of things, the deserted domain of wreckage and cast-off remnants. Here lay a broken spar half buried in the sand, part of the complex fabric that once enabled some fair ship to skim the waves. And here among the kelp and the bodies of marine animals he saw the loosened staves of a barrel limply spread and upthrust like the fingers of some dead giant, with an empty bottle near by as if fallen from that slack grip. And here, lastly, he was aware of Junius Peabody, also on the beach, washed up at the far edge of the world like any other useless bit of jetsam: to stay and to rot.

"Pretty low," said Junius Peabody.

But Sydney took no offence, and seemed, on the contrary, to extract a certain degree of pleasure from the other's recognition of his lot.

"Oh, it 'in't so bad," he declared, with a quite human impulse to reverse the picture. "There's easy pickin' if you know 'ow. Nobody starves 'ere anyw'y, that's one thing. No nigger will let a man starve—a soft lot of flats that w'y, the niggers. Often you

fall in with a weddin' or a birthday or somethin'; they're always 'avin' a feast and *they* don't care who comes—they 'in't proud. Then you got nobody aharryin' of you up and down and askin' you wot for, that's a comfort—my word! And once in a while there's sure to be a new chum come along with a bit of brass—some flat who's willin' to stand the drinks."

"Like me," suggested Junius.

"Oh, there's plenty like you," nodded the Sydney Duck. "It's the pearlin' brings 'em, though it 'in't so soft as maybe they think, you see. When they're stony they mostly tyke a job till they find a chance to get aw'y again—that's if they're able to do anything at all."

For the first time in his life, probably, Junius Peabody considered his accomplishments with a view to estimating their value in the open market.

"I once won the fancy diving event at Travers Island," he said. "And I used to swim the four-forty in a trifle over six minutes."

"That must 'a' been several seasons back," grinned Sydney.

"Not so many," said Junius slowly. "I forgot to add that I was also an excellent judge of French brandy."

He got to his feet and began to divest himself of the spotted remains of an expensive white silk suit.

"What's the gyme now?"

"Morning bath. Have you had yours yet?"

The Sydney Duck laughed, laughter that was strangely unmirthful and so convulsive that Junius blinked at him, fearing a fit of some kind.

"You're a rare 'un," gasped the Sydney Duck. "I

seen a good few, I 'ave, but none as rare as you. Mornin' bawth—and 'ave I 'ad mine yet! . . . On the beach at Fufuti!" He waggled his hands.

"Well, if it seems so queer as all that why not blow yourself?" offered Junius with perfect good nature. "You can't tell, you might like it. Come along."

"Garn!" snarled the other.

So Junius turned away and walked down the strand alone. Outward the ground swell broke and came rushing in with long-spaced undulations, and as he stood at the verge, shrinking in his nakedness, the east flamed suddenly through its great red archway and turned all the world to tinted glory. Fair across to him was flung a shining path. It seemed as if he had only to step out along that straight way of escape, and for an instant he had a yearning to try. Never in his life had he followed a single course to a definite end, and what could be better now than to choose one at last, to follow, to go on following—and not to return.

He looked down at his body and saw as a revelation the pitiful wasting of his strength—how scrawny he was of limb, how bloated about the middle, and his skin how soft and leprous white. He made an ugly figure under the clear light of the morning, like the decaying things around him, where the carrion flies were beginning to swarm in the sun. And there came upon him then a sudden physical loathing of himself, a final sense of disaster and defeat.

"If I could only begin again——" thought Junius Peabody, and stopped and laughed aloud at the wish, which is old as folly and futile as sin. But he had no relief from laughter either, for it was the same he had just heard from the Sydney Duck, a sort of hiccup.

So he stopped that too and strode forthright into the wash. . . .

Something flung against his shin and tripped him. He sprawled awkwardly from a singular impact, soft though quite solid. He could see the object floating on the next wave and was curious enough to catch it up. It was a rough lump of some substance, a dirty greyish-brown in colour, the size of a boy's football. The touch of it was rather greasy.

Junius stayed with the trove in his hands and the tingling of an odd excitement in his mind. His first instinct rejected the evidence. He had a natural suspicion that events do not happen so. But while he brought to bear such knowledge as he owned, facts read or heard, he found himself still thrilled.

There was a sound from the shore and the Sydney Duck hurried up behind him to the edge of the water, both hands clawed, his little eyes distended.

"You've got it!" He took two steps after a retreating wave, but the next drove him hopping. It was strange to see the fellow drawn by a frantic eagerness and chased again by the merest flicker of foam, lifting his feet as gingerly as a cat.

"What have I got?" asked Junius, standing at mid-thigh where the surf creamed in between them.

"It's the stuff! Chuck it over—wha-i-i!" Sydney's voice rose to a squeal as a frothing ripple caught his toes.

Junius came wading shoreward, but he did not relinquish the lump when the other felt and paddled it feverishly, babbling.

"Look at that—look at that! All smooth an' soft —an' kind of slimy, like. Oh, no, we 'in't struck it fair rich this time, nor nothin'—oh, *now*! . . Mytey,

I tell you—by Gaw', I tell you it's the real stuff!"

"But oughtn't there to be an odour—a perfume?"

"Not yet—not while it's fresh. That comes after, And any'ow, what else could it be—'ey?"

Junius shook his head.

"'Ere, I'll show you, you poor flat!" The larrikin raged about like a man in a strong temper. "Where's a nail? Gimme a nail, a long nail, or a piece of wire—'ell, I'll show you!"

He snatched up a strip of planking from the sand and wrenched a rusty spike from it. With swift jerky gestures he gathered a few dry chips and splinters, whipped a match, and set them alight. In this brief blaze he heated the spike and then applied it to the lump. It sank smoothly, leaving a little melted ring around the hole.

"Ambergris!" he yelped. "Worth near two pound an ounce, right 'ere in Fufuti. . . . And the 'arf of it's mine," he added, with a startling shift to the most brazen impudence.

Junius regarded him, incredulous.

"What? That's wot? Wasn't I here? 'In't I been pallin' along of you? It's a fair divvy. W'y, damn your soul," he screamed in a sudden febrile blast of fury, "you don't think you're goin' to 'og my 'arf an' all?"

"*Your* half!" repeated Junius. "Huh—nothing small about you, is there? Why, you weren't anywhere near when I found it. Didn't you pass up the swim?"

Just here the Sydney Duck made his mistake. Had he proceeded with any finesse, with any understanding of his man, he might have done about as he pleased and it is likely that little of moment would have tran-

spired on Fufuti beach that morning. But he acted by his lights, which were narrow and direct, and he hit Junius Peabody suddenly in the smiling face of him and knocked him reeling backward. The next instant he was running for the nearest palms with the prize tucked under one arm.

Junius sat on the sand and blinked, and at first he felt rather hurt, for he was not used to being treated so, at least not while he was sober. And thereafter he grinned, for such was his way of turning aside a casual unpleasantness, and the thing undeniably had its humorous aspect. But finally came the throb of a strange new emotion, as if some one had planted a small, hot coal in his breast.

It is a fact worthy of note that never before had Junius Peabody known the sting of a living anger. But never before had Junius Peabody been reduced to a naked Junius Peabody, dot and carry nothing—penniless, desperate, and now cheated of a last hope. That made the difference.

"Hey!" he protested. "See here, you know—Dammit!"

He struggled up and climbed anyhow into trousers, coat, and shoes, and set off at a shambling trot, with no clear notion of what he meant to do but keeping the larrikin in sight.

Sydney dodged in among the trees, found them too scant for cover, paused to fling a yellow snarl over his shoulder, and swung up the shore. He turned, questing here and there, shouting as he ran, and presently raised an answering shout from a hollow whence another figure started up to join him, a bearded, heavy-set rogue, whose abnormally long arms dangled like

an ape's out of his sleeveless shirt. Junius recognized Willems, the third of their party the night before, and he knew where the interest of that sullen big Hollander would lie. He had a coalition of thievery against him now. The two beachcombers ran on together, footing briskly past the long boat sheds and the high white veranda of Bendemeer's place. . . .

Under this iron thatch stood the man Bendemeer himself, cool and lathy in spotless ducks, planted there, as was his morning custom, to oversee and command all his little capital. And in truth it was a kingdom's capital, the centre of a trading monopoly of the old type and chief seat of as strange and absolute a tyrant as the world still offers room for ; rich powerful, independent, fearing nothing between heaven and hell and at once the best-loved and the best-hated individual in his sphere of influence.

Bendemeer, trader, philanthropist, and purveyor of rotgut, was one of those unclassed growths of the South Seas that almost constitute a new racial type. Nobody could have placed his nationality or his caste or his accent. His name was of a piece with the grim self-sufficiency that gave nothing and asked nothing ; an obvious jest, borrowed from the Persian song of an Irish poet, but the one touch of fancy about him. Somewhere, somehow, he had taken a cynic twist or a rankling wound that had turned his white man's blood once for all. They tell stories of such cases up and down the islands, and mostly the stories are very ugly and discreditable indeed. But not so concerning Bendemeer ; against whom was no scandal, only curses and bitterness. For his peculiarity took the especially irritating form of fair dealings with some thousands of brown-skinned natives and no dealings at all with any

man of his own colour—except to beat him at strict business and then to sell him as much villainous liquor as he could at the highest possible price. As he leaned there indolently in his doorway with arms folded and cheroot between his thin lips he could measure his own land as far as he could see on either side, a small part of his holdings in plantations and trading stations throughout the archipelago. Offshore, behind the only good strip of barrier reef and near the only navigable channel on the south coast, lay anchored his *Likely Jane*, flagship of a smart little navy. His gang of boys was hustling cargo out of her in surf-boats, and both boys and boats were the handiest and ablest that could be found anywhere for that ticklish work. He had only to turn his head to view the satisfactory bulk of his sheds and dependencies, solid, new-painted. The house at his back was trim, broad, and comfortable, and in the storeroom underneath lay thousands of dollars' worth of assorted trade goods, all of which would eventually become copra and great wealth.

This was the man, decidedly in possession of his own legs and able to stand and to navigate on the same, to whom Junius Peabody appealed in his wretched need. . . .

Junius stumbled up to the steps. The burst had marrow-drawn him, his lungs laboured pitifully as if he were breathing cotton wool. It was hot, for the sun had sprung wide like an opened furnace gate, but he had not started a pore.

"I've been robbed," he wheezed, and pointed a wavering hand. "Those chaps there—robbed——!"

Bendemeer glanced aside up the strand after the disappearing ruffians and then down at the complainant, but otherwise he did not move, only stayed consider-

ing from his lean, leathery mask, with still eyes, outward-looking.

"What do you care?" he said idly. "You'll be dead in a month anyhow."

Junius gaped toward him dizzily. The fellow was the local authority and besides had taken his money. He could not believe that he had heard aright. "But, say—they've stolen my property!"

Bendemeer shot a blue ring of smoke into the sunshine. "In that case you've lost it. They're heading for the Rocks, and once they've gone to earth there you never could find them—you'd be torn to pieces if you did."

He flicked the ash of his cheroot in a pause. "I suppose you mean I might help you," he continued. "I might, but I won't. I've seen a good many of your kind before, drift stuff that gets washed up on the beach. You're not worth it. And now, since you have no further business with me, I'd be obliged if you'd kindly get to hell out of my front yard. You're interfering with the view. . . ."

Junius Peabody found himself groping away through the sunlight on Fufuti beach once more. A dead calm held the air. Under the steady, low organ note of the reef he could hear only the drag of his own steps, the curious, unforgetable "shr-ring" of boot leather on coral.

It was borne upon him then that he had just acquired a liberal education, that he had learned more essential facts within the last hour than he had ever gained before in his twenty-odd years—a tabloid of life—and too late to be of any use. Such abstractions are sometimes valuable to a man, but they are not the sort that brings a lump in his throat and a winking

in his eyes. The thing, the sheerly heartfelt thing that Junius Peabody said to himself, sniffling, was this: "And he didn't—didn't even offer me a drink!"

There was nothing to draw him any farther—no help, no promise of success, not even a single witness to shame with a grin or to urge with an expectant stare—nothing outside himself. Fufuti beach lay stark and aching white before him. The two thieves had long since lost themselves among the palms. Down by the water's edge a couple of Bendemeer's boat boys were salvaging odds and ends lost overboard in an upset in yesterday's heavy surf. They did not waste a thought or a look on him. He was many degrees less important than a lot of other rubbish around there. He might just as well, he might much better, slump down in a sodden heap amid the rest of the jetsam. And yet he did not. . . . And he did go on. For some obscure, irrational human reason, he did go on. Perhaps because of the tiny coal in his breast, blown red by Bendemeer's blasting contempt. Perhaps because, after all, no man ever quite achieves complete resemblance to a jellyfish.

On the southern tip of Fufuti stands Tenbow Head, the end of a rough little jut of land known locally as the Rocks. To speak by the book, there is neither rock nor head, but the abyss turned in its sleep once, and shouldered half a mile of Fufuti's shore-line to a height of thirty feet—enough for a mountain in this sea of humble atolls. Incidentally it smashed the elevated reefs like chalk in a mortar. Tenbow is a wreck of shattered coral terraces, clad in the eager growths which profit by its trifling rise and which alone do profit. For the rest it remains the island jungle,

a section apart and untouched, almost impenetrable.

Junius Peabody began his exploration of this cheerful region by falling on his face in a gully and bruising his nose very grievously. He found no trail to guide him up the slope. It was pitted like slag, deceitful as old honeycomb. The footing crumbled; tempting beds of moss and fern slipped away at his clutch; twisting lianas caught his ankles and sent him asprawl. The very ground seemed armed against him with a malignant life of its own. He had to creep among jagged teeth that sliced his flimsy garments and his putty-soft flesh. And when a loosened mass slid gently over at a touch and caught and crushed an arm he scarcely wondered whether any personal power had directed. It was all the same.

For a long time he lay looking at his pulped fingers and the driven drops of blood from the quick of his nails, sensing the exquisite pain almost as a luxury, hugging it to him. But at length he stirred and began to wriggle forward again.

"If I'm going to die anyway," said Junius Peabody, "I'm going to die doing this." Which was an extraordinary remark on all accounts. . . .

And so by dint of following something and still following with unlimited purpose over a limited terrain, he ran it down in the end and came to the hiding place he sought.

A rooted instinct of the potentially criminal, which prompts them to be ready to flee though no man pursueth, had moved the beachcombers of Fufuti long since to prepare their snug retreat in the heart of the Rocks. On the inward shore of the promontory they had found a level bit of shelf screened by lush vegeta-

tion, with the green-stained cliff for wall and the sapphire waters of the lagoon below for forecourt. Hither they repaired in the intervals of lesser lawbreaking and free entertainment, always secure of hearth and shelter where the broad pandanus spread its shingles. And hither, straight as merry men to their shaw, they had brought the great treasure of the morning.

A truly homelike scene was that on which Junius Peabody peered from ambush above. . . .

From the convenient branch of a tree the Sydney Duck had suspended by its middle a single stout stick. At one end of the stick he had slung the stolen lump in a fibre-net. At the other he had attached a battered tin can of the kind that the beneficent enterprise of an American oil company had spread to most of the dark parts of the earth. On this balance of a most ancient and primitive design he was engaged in weighing his ill-gotten gains, squatting to the task.

"A gallon of water weighs a good eight pound," he declared. "I figger five quarts an' a 'arf. And five is ten and the 'arf is one——"

Willems stood beside him in an attitude of stolid scepticism. There was no mistaking the breed of this big derelict. He had managed to assert it on a Pacific isle by fashioning himself somehow a pipe with a clay bowl and a long stem of the true drooping line. He looked quite domestic and almost paternal as he shuffled his broad feet and towered over the little larrikin. But the fists he carried in the pockets of his dungarees bulged like coco-nuts, and his hairy arms were looped brown cables. A tough man for an argument was Mynheer Willems.

"Yaw," he was saying. "But how you know you got five quart and a half?"

"W'y, any fool could guess near enough!" cried Sydney, with the superfluous violence that was his caste mark. "And you—y' big Dutchman—'in't you swilled enough beer in your time to judge? Besides, the bally can 'olds three gallon—bound to. There's one sure measure. . . . I say we got, anyw'y, eleven pounds of this stuff, and I 'appen to know that Bendemeer's fair crazy after it. He'll pay big. We ought to 'ave two thousand dollars Chile to split. . . . Two thousand silver dibs!"

It was a cue to friendly feeling, that luscious phrase. The two men beamed upon it as Sydney dumped the balance and swung the fibre-net. But it was also a cue of another kind, for it brought Junius Peabody on stage. He arrived by the simple process of sliding in a bundle over the brow of the cliff.

"That's mine," he announced.

The beachcombers stayed stricken, which was pardonable. Surely there never showed a less heroic figure or a stranger defiance than that of Mr. Peabody, torn, bedraggled, and besmeared. There was nothing muscular or threatening about him. He took no pose. He offered no weapon. He came on at them limping, with quivering lip and empty hands, even with open hands. And yet the incredible fact remained that he did come on at them and continued to come.

"It's mine," repeated Junius. "All mine, and I'm going to have it—all!"

Amazement held them motionless for as long as it took him to cross the ledge—pleased amazement, as they knew him better. There are few things more congenial to certain gentlemen than a chance to maul an easy victim. And here was the easiest victim that either of these gentlemen had seen in many a day. He

was no match for them, could be no possible match. Since he would have it so, they accepted joyously, closed in upon him from either side and started to drag him down as a preliminary to trampling the lights out of him. . . .

But they counted without the absolute simplicity of a man who has found an objective for the first time in his life and has set himself to reach it, regardless. Mr. Peabody did not pause to fight or to wrestle. He let them get a good grip on him and then took the unexpected way by keeping right on—and, pinioning their arms, merely walking them over the edge into space.

For an instant the three seemed to hang suspended, interlocked amid smashing vines and taut creepers, and then toppled toward the lagoon.

Even before they struck, Sydney's despairing yell rang out. Their plunge drowned it and gave way to the cries of startled sea birds, knifing the air in flung white crescents and circling about the troubled spot that boiled like blue champagne. But when he came up again the unfortunate larrikin loosed shriek after bubbling shriek and floundered madly for shore, all else forgotten in his dominant terror.

Willems was made of sterner metal. He grappled Peabody as they rose and sought to use his long arms, reaching for the throat. He learned better presently, however, and he learned, too, how much chance he had against a man who had once won a fancy diving title at Travers Island. Junius took him down by the feet and held him down until there was no spring and no temper left to him, only a large and limp and very badly frightened Hollander who wanted to get out of

the wet. He was quite willing to paddle after the Sydney Duck. Meanwhile Junius gathered up an object in a fibre-net that was floating near by and swam on to follow his purpose. . . .

The man Bendemeer was standing behind his little zinc bar when a shadow sifted in through the doorway, and, looking up, he took a backward step that nearly cost him his stock of glassware. The man Bendemeer was not used to stepping back from anything, but the red and dripping ruin that confronted him was beyond usage of any kind. Junius Peabody looked as if he had been run through a mangle. His dress was fragmentary. Most of the skin had been flayed from the more prominent curves of his anatomy. His left arm hung useless. He crawled in and propped himself to keep from falling, and called for brandy in a voice scarcely recognizable. "Peabody—is it?" demanded Bendemeer, incredulous.

"Will you keep a customer waiting?" rasped Junius. "You needn't stare." He laughed weakly. "You can't order me off now, Bendemeer. I'm a paying customer again."

"As how?"

Junius lifted a fist and dropped the sopping net on the bar. "Ambergris—eleven pounds of it. My property."

Bendemeer inspected the brownish lump, and, as he understood, his thin lips pleated and his glance quickened. "Oh, ho!" he said. "Was it *this* they robbed you of?"

Peabody nodded.

"You got it back from them—yourself?"

"There's the stuff."

"So I see. But I'm asking—did you take it away

from those two cutthroats alone, without any help ? "

" I did. And now I've come to talk business. It's a good proposition, Bendemeer."

The tall, grim white man studied him with a narrow regard glinting like a probe and equally cool, detached, and impersonal. He had the air of a surgeon who approaches a clinical experiment. " I'm inclined to think it may be," he decided. " Yes—a sporting risk ; though I'm certain enough of the result, Peabody, mind that. I believe I might make a bit of a gamble with myself, just to see that I'm right. Come now—what do you want ? "

" A thousand silver," said Junius.

" I haven't so much about me. Suppose we say a standing credit for a thousand drinks instead."

Junius stiffened against the bar.

" It amounts to the same thing, doesn't it ? " continued Bendemeer : " Why should you trouble about dollars—mere tokens ? You can't get away from Fufuti. The *Jane* out there, she's due to sail this morning on a round of my plantations. She's the only ship clearing for a month at least. . . . By the time you'd drunk yourself to death I'd simply have the money back again."

Peabody stared, and a streak of crimson leaped into his cheek as if a whiplash had been laid across it.

" Damn you ! " he cried shakily. " Give me that brandy—I'll pay for it. Here's the stuff. It's mine. I went after it and I got it. I earned it myself, and fairly ! "

" To what end ? " Bendemeer cut in. " So you can pickle yourself properly before burial ? "

Junius Peabody writhed. " What's it to you how

I spend it afterward? I'm a free agent. I can do as I like."

"That," said Bendemeer with quiet emphasis, "is a lie."

Holding his quivering subject, impaled on his glance as it seemed, he reached a black square bottle. He shoved a glass in front of Junius Peabody and poured a generous measure. With one hand he kept the glass covered and with the other pointed out through the doorway.

"I say you lie, and I'll demonstrate:

"You see my schooner out there? That's her boat on the beach. She leaves in half an hour; her captain's come now for final orders. She goes first from here to an island of mine a hundred miles away. I planted it with coco-nuts five years ago, and left a population of maybe a dozen Kanakas to tend them—it's going to be worth money some day. Nukava, they call it, and it's the edge of the earth, the farthest corner, and the loneliest and the driest. There's not a drop of anything on the place except water, scant and brackish at that. But a white man could live there, if he were fit to live at all, and wanted to badly enough.

"Now I'll make you an offer. I'll buy this lump of stuff from you, and I'll buy it either of two ways. A half interest in Nukava and you go there at once to take charge as agent. . . . Or else—here's your brandy and I'll keep you perpetually drunk as long as you last."

Junius swayed on his feet. "Agent?" he stammered. "To go away——?"

"Now. And once there you can't escape. You're stuck for a year on a coral gridiron, Peabody, to sit and fry."

"What for? You——! What for?"

Bendemeer shrugged.

"Because it amuses me. Because I please. Because—I know what you'll do. I've been watching men of your sort all my life, and I know what they're worth—drift on the beaches, scraps, trash, jetsam. Regeneration, eh? Rot and drivel! You can't save yourself any more than you could lift yourself by your own boot straps. It suits me to prove it to you this way."

He lifted his hand away from the glass. Peabody's stare dropped from that cryptic regard to the waiting brandy before him, the red liquor, odorous and maddening. Peabody's lips moved, and he wet them with the tip of his tongue and gripped the bar with straining white fingers.

"You're wrong," he breathed. "You lose, Bendemeer. I can do it—I've just learned I can do it. And, by God," he added, prayerfully, "I will."

Bendemeer took up the netted lump.

"Very well," he said, off-hand. "Just a moment, while I chuck this stuff in the storeroom."

He turned and tramped out through the rear without a glance behind him—and he left Junius Peabody there alone before the bar.

He was gone perhaps five minutes, quite as much as that, an ample space of time. When he came back there was no glass in sight. It had vanished, and the room reeked with the fumes of a very flagrant distillation of French brandy. He looked his customer up and down and his lids lowered a trifle.

"Well, how did you like the flavour?"

The face of Junius Peabody was like a death's-head, but the eyes in his sockets blazed with a light all their

own, and, standing there erect, standing square on his two legs with his feet braced apart, he swore—somewhat inexpertly, it was true, but still quite heartily: good, crisp profanity such as one able man may use with another—until Bendemeer's puzzled gaze caught the sparkle of broken glass lying in a great splash of liquid in a corner of the floor. "I'm going to Nukava!" cried Junius Peabody. "And you see—you see there are some scraps thrown up on the beach that are worth something after all, and be damned to you, Bendemeer!"

Bendemeer's grip shot out as if against his volition and after an instant's hesitation Peabody took it. He did not yet know all the trader had done for him, perhaps would never know, but on the inscrutable front of that remarkable man was a faint glow curiously unlike a loser's chagrin.

"So it seems," acknowledged Bendemeer. "So it seems"—and smiled a little, rather oddly. . . .

Bendemeer was still smiling that way, all by himself, an hour or so later when he had watched the *Likely Jane* lay her course for Nukava with the new agent on board and had gone down into his storeroom to put the place to rights. There was a clutter of odds and ends of cargo that had been spilled from an upset surf-boat the day before. Most of it had been salvaged by his Kanaka boys along shore, but a certain broken tub containing tallow had lost part of its contents. However, he was able now to restore a large lump weighing perhaps eleven pounds or so, which made the tally nearly good.

THE ADVERSARY

IN the good old days of Thursday Island there passed as waif currency a certain local jest. When some pride of the pearling fleet was moved to approve himself, his company, and the pervading wickedness in general he was wont to state—more or less titubant on his pins the while—that the only honest men in that merry little hell had come by land. It was a useful and a harmless jest, salted with the essential fact whereby legends are preserved and made historic. But from a date it lost its savour. . . .

At the Portugee's one night—Saturday, be sure, for it was always Saturday on Thursday with the Pearler's—a gentleman from Wooloomooloo who had just adorned the traditional witticism with profane fancy found himself confronted by a quiet stranger who laid down his coat and a new law.

"I don't mind so much what you call yourselves *to* yourselves," he observed, while the circle shouted and spread about. "Nor your nice new magistrate, nor your missionaries, nor your artillery guard on the hill. Maybe you've overlooked the modern spread of respectability and corrugated roofings. Or maybe you know 'em better than I do. But I've come to tarry with you for a time, my friends. And, as long as I'm in your midst, any chap that says I'm not honest—and can't prove it—I'll knock seven bells out of him."

Which he did, *seriatim*.

Now, there never was another place habitually so incurious as Thursday Island in its social dealings. It is the last raw outpost towards the last unknown continent of Papua, and those who resort to its blistering grid among the reefs are folks that have largely reduced their human complex to the simple thirst. Where every prospect displeases and man is only an exile the merest regard for etiquette will warn against prying very far into your neighbour's little eccentricities unless you are prepared to push the inquiry with a knife.

Also, there never was another place like Thursday for variations on a colour theme. That season the islanders counted twenty-two races among the two thousand of them, including half-castes ; and most of their common gossip was carried on in a lingo of rather less than two hundred words. You cannot do much abstract speculating in *bêche de mer.*

Perhaps these points would somewhat explain the stranger's success. Nobody questioned his account of hailing from the Low Archipelago, or the curiously yacht-like snap to his craft, or his own odd employment on a pearling licence. Nobody wondered when he paid off and scattered his Kanaka crew—possible links with his past—and shipped a new lot from the motley mob on the jetty.

And a motley lot he picked. His cook was Chinese ; his head diver a Manilaman : the delicate lemon of Macao mingled with the saddle tints of the Coromandel Coast about his decks, and for mate he found a stranded West African negro who bore, in pathetic loyalty to some ironic crimp, the name of Buttermilk. Still, such a mixture was ordinary enough at Thursday. . . . Ordinary too was the fact—which again

nobody noticed—that they were all opium users, who do not talk, rather than drunkards, who do.

This honest man had brought his honesty to the proper shop for face value. His story began with that startling gesture at the Portugee's. It continued in the epic strain of a halfpenny serial. The hero himself might have filled a whole illustration; thewed like a colossus, crop black hair in a point over the brow of a student, a smooth, long jaw always strangely pallid, and grey eyes, inscrutable and ageless. With his jungle step, with his thin ducks moulded to the coiling muscles underneath by the press of the southerly bluster, when he came swinging along the front the crowd parted left and right before him. Most crowds must have done so; probably many had. But at Thursday he was almost an institution. . . .

"'Im? Cap'n of the *Fancy Free*, that flash little lugger out beyond. 'Ardest driver and str'itest Johnny in the fleet." Thus the inevitable informing larrikin, eager to cadge a drink from the tourist on shore leave. "'E'd chyse you acrost the Pacific to p'y you tuppence 'e might ha' owed you—that's 'is sort. And—my word!—'e's got a jab to the boko you don't want to get p'id at no price! Wetherbee, they call 'im 'Honest Wetherbee'—that's 'im."

For he lived to the title. If it is honest to abide by every hampering regulation that makes you solid with the authorities; to split prices over a bit of inferior shell; to lose two weeks with your outfit in quarantine, voluntarily—that happened when the *Opalton* brought a hot cholera scare and her passenger list camped on Friday Island—to share your stores with starving lighthouse keepers; to drink a set of hard cases blind and stiff and then, departing clear-headed,

settle the whole damage yourself; to pay all bills square: in short, if it be the part of honesty to give the cash and take the credit every time, Cap'n Wetherbee played it. Amazingly—as a man might play an arduous game!

Within six months Port Kennedy and all thereabout would have sworn by him; he had dined with the sub-collector and the harbour master and was calling various pilots, navigators, and odd fish of Torres Strait by their handier names—especially the pilots. These were the rewards of reputation, and they defined Thursday's acceptance of him up to that night in the wet season when his visit ended. . . .

A Saturday again. The north-west monsoon had broken with torrential downpour, and now the island reeked in a steam bath, as if the young moon had focused a sick, intolerable ray upon it. A high wind stormed the sands and brought no relief. The quiver of the surf beat on the senses like heat waves. A few thrashing pawpaws and palm tufts threw shadows like tormented sleepers along the beach. But up in the town Thursday took its usual "tangle," shouted and sang and drowned its fever without assuagement in the periodic crisis of the fortune hunt. A Brisbane steamer lay ready to depart with the morning tide. Meanwhile her shore goers, "seeing a bit o' life," did their possible to keep up the prevailing temperature. Only the long jetty was quiet. Here a man might stand back and away from it all and hear the single note of its turmoil and peer into the mist of its lights like a contemplative Lucifer at the verge of some lesser inferno.

And in truth there stood such a man in much that

manner. He had come down soft-footed from the streets, and, lingering to assure himself he had not been followed, stepped out upon the jetty where he stayed motionless and attentive. His glance roved from point to point, noting, verifying. First the outward spread twinkle of the deserted lugger fleet at anchor; then the bulk of the Brisbane steamer at the T head, with her yellow cargo flares that showed loading still in progress: and the town, all unconscious of him. Something sinister seemed to detach this big, dim figure from the restlessness of the night; brooding apart there so coolly alert and contained. He regarded Thursday for a while, and at last, alone and with himself for confidant, he made a gesture as if to seal its folly and its whole destiny with final contempt and triumph.

He was turning away with a swing of broad shoulders when another figure slipped from the shadow and moved suddenly to confront him.

"Ah—Captain Wetherbee!"

Everywhere and always up and down the earth, and more particularly in rather unhealthful corners of it, are men who have to go braced for that questioning slur, that significant little drag before the name. It is a challenge out of time and space, and at sound of it the big fellow drew up tense like a battler in a ring.

"Halvers," stated the new-comer without preamble or apology. "I'll take halvers, if you please, Captain Wetherbee."

He revealed himself as a long, weedy frame in limp linen. Both hands were jammed into his side pockets with a singular effect—against a hypothetical chill, one would have thought. Without his stoop he might have been as tall as Wetherbee, but he had shrunken like the sleeves tucked above his bony wrists. He had

an air at once fearful and implacable—the doubly dangerous menace of a timid man ready to strike.

Wetherbee was aware of it, though incredulous.

"You spoke?" he inquired, from a lengthened jaw.

"I said—halvers," affirmed this extraordinary apparition. There was no mistaking the peculiar flavour in his husky voice—no mistaking, either, that at present its owner was deadly cold sober. "Don't move, captain. I've got you covered from here. . . . And this time I'm not afraid to shoot!"

Wetherbee continued aware of it.

"Just my little device for holding your attention," explained the new-comer, between a cough and a snuffle, the remnant of polite affectation. "I thought it out very carefully."

"Ho! You did?" queried Wetherbee.

"You used to be such a damnably abrupt sort of person yourself."

"Ho! Did I?"

"Even then. Even then, when we sat under the same pulpit—such time as you found it socially expedient to attend—it was matter of grave doubt to me whether you took any real benefit. You were always a poor listener, Mr.—ah—Wetherbee. Whereas I—I was chosen deacon that winter, you may remember."

Wetherbee stared into the shaven, haunted face thus preposterously thrust at him across the years. Aside from the unimaginable oddity of the attack, there was cunning and unsettling purpose in it, but he yielded no nerve reaction, no start or outcry; not even a denial. And by this—had he been wise—the other might have taken warning.

"By Jove!" was all his comment.

"We've come a considerable distance," suggested the new arrival.

They looked in curious silence, each measuring that span from the edge of things. Thursday howled on one side of them and on the other wind and the sea, until the humour of it won Wetherbee to a grim chuckle.

"Well, what do they call you nowadays—deacon?"

"I'm usually known as Selden, thanks."

"Seldom?"

"I shouldn't insist: any more than you yourself, captain."

"And what are you doing here?"

"I dropped in from Samarai, meaning to catch the Brisbane steamer yonder. I've been diving up there all season. I'm a very fair diver, really; only my luck is generally so poor."

To any passer-by he must have seemed the usual loafer, with a string of woes on tap. But Wetherbee, one eye to the bulging pockets, appeared in no way bored.

"Strolling along the front, I chanced to recognize you. *That* was luck, if you like. I've thought so. Especially since making inquiries. I've made rather exhaustive inquiries. In fact, I believe I have your rating fairly up to date." He coughed again. "Captain Wetherbee, do you remember when we last met?"

"No," said Wetherbee shortly.

Thereupon Mr. Selden recalled that meeting, and others, and his voice trailed like a snake in the dust, looping cryptic patterns. It was one of those counts of grievance and disaster such as almost any broken fugitive among far places has to tell. Thursday can

offer them by the yard, and dear at the price of a drink. He spoke of shares and deals and swindling betrayal, of hope and fortune lost and the false lead that puts a man on the chute and sets him off for a blackleg and a wanderer. All in the clipped jargon of the markets, a common tale, but with this difference in the telling—it came away briefly, with the slow-biting venom that such a fugitive would be apt to reserve for only one out of all possible living listeners in the world. From over the hidden weapon he drove home his point; while Wetherbee stood there rooted on the jetty, like the Wedding Guest.

". . . So you knifed the lot of us in the dark—every one that trusted you—and bolted. That was your way. You sent me ashore from that last yachting party all primed to go my last penny on a dead bird. I was flattered. I used to credit your honesty more or less myself—then."

"And now?" suggested Wetherbee.

Mr. Selden, late deacon, drew a husky breath.

"Why, now—I've caught up with you. I'm the flaw in the title, at 50 per cent. I'm the judgment out of the past! Verily, no man shall escape it: do you mark? No man comes so far or hides his track so cleverly, even at Thursday Island. I've got your record—as you've got mine, of course; but yours is rather worse, with a warrant pending—of which, by the way, I know the very date. . . . And, besides, I've nothing at all to lose. I'm only a broken diver. Nobody ever called me 'Honest' Selden or 'Honest' anything else!"

His wrists stiffened as Wetherbee took a step.

"You mean to blow, you wasp?"

"You won't make me. Blow! That's no good to

me: I mean to get level. Halvers, I said—captain. . . . I'm in!"

"On what?"

"On your new speculation, of course." He came very close to capering. "Your latest devilry. Don't I know your little methods? D'you think I couldn't smell it out? Public character, no suspicion, traces all removed—alibi all complete—*and* a clear road to the back door.

"You sneaked your crew out of town to-night. Your lugger's ready to slip cable. You've been hobnobbing all evening with the pilot you camped along with on Friday Island for two weeks—that had the *Opalton*—by George, I believe it was you made him a sot on the sly! I wouldn't put it past you. You used to gammon us the same way on your cursed week-end sprees. Don't I *know*? Haven't I *reason* to know? But you needn't have pumped him so close. I could have told you days ago what she takes aboard of her this trip. . . ."

"The hell you could!"

"Pearls: the season's sweep. Twenty thousand pounds' worth of pearls!" recited Selden. "Eh? Twenty thousand—and I've got you by the short hairs!" His eyes shone in the moonlight with a fanatic gleam. "*Thus saith the Lord God: An adversary there shall be, and he shall bring down thy strength from thee.*"

Then Captain Wetherbee relaxed and laughed in his chest to match the note of the reef. "Blackmail and piracy! My colonial oath, deacon, I never saw your beat. So you've dropped to me! I go bail you asked a blessing on the enterprise!"

Selden did not deny it.

"Let's hear the rest," urged Wetherbee, while his chuckle echoed the lap of waves among dark pilings. "What's your notion? Did you picture me sticking up the consignors as they walk aboard the plank and passing you your share in a little hand-bag?"

The deacon shuffled nervously.

"It can't matter how you do it."

"Can't it? Now, don't you go disappointing me." He stole a step nearer. "Those pearls have been locked in the strong room of the Brisbane steamer since early afternoon. Now then. How the devil am I—are we—to nab 'em? Come! You're the little personal Providence in this affair, at 50 per cent. Don't tell me with all your knowing you didn't know *that*!"

"It's your deliver," said Selden, "anyhow."

"Well, let's take counsel—I'm agreeable to have an adversary. Goodness knows I haven't had much amusement so far—the thing's been so rotten easy. By way of a text—Brother Seldom—and a point of departure: did you ever hear of the *Volga*? Ever hear of the *Quetta* or the *Mecca*; dozens of other ships lost one time or another between here and Cape Flattery?

"Pity about them too—they fell a trifle off the track. Just a few fathoms off the track among these millions of reefs that will rip the heart out of anything afloat. Suppose for the sake of argument our Brisbane steamer which we're both so interested in—out there at the dock head—suppose she should happen to go wandering this trip—say, somewhere around Tribulation Passage, two hours out. Suppose she should—as a slant of luck." His voice lowered with

obscurely evil suggestion. "Would it occur to you we might have any chance of salvage on those pearls?"

"I—I don't understand," stammered Selden. "The passage is lighted. There's a light on Tribulation Shoal."

"So there is. What a helpful chap you are to work with! You keep it to port as you turn the Blackbird Reef. It's a fourth order fixed dioptric—unattended. The keeper lives on Horn Island. But suppose, now—suppose that light were moved, either way?"

"Move the light!"

"In effect, merely; in effect. A man might very readily land there from the lee and blanket that light to the westward. And if that same man, with something like a discarded lightship lantern aboard his lugger, should then anchor half a mile away, and show his light at the masthead—hey? A fifty-foot elevation is visible at nearly fourteen miles twenty-five feet up. But a twenty-five-foot elevation gives a total of only eleven point four. . . . You begin to see the possibilities for error—particularly if the pilot of the oncoming steamer should happen to be, as you wisely suggest, a bit of a sot with a hazy eye——"

"My God! You're going to wreck her!"

"Hush!" said Wetherbee very loudly.

Selden whirled around to find a black-skinned native standing impassive behind him. At the same instant a steel grip locked his wrists. "Not that!" he gasped, struggling. "My God, man, you wouldn't! You daren't!"

"No? And yet you said you knew my little methods." "Honest" Wetherbee shifted a thumb to his throat and smiled into his face. "I've a mind to show you, deacon—shall I?—how far I *have* come and

how cleverly I *have* covered my tracks. . . . Hya, you fella boy—that fella boat all ready? Then bear a hand here one time. We've got a passenger."

Now, it is a fact that no one knows or is ever likely to know the actual explanation for the wreck of the Brisbane steamer, which left Thursday Island that night and came to grief some two hours later on Tribulation Shoals. Other craft have gone the same way from natural causes, and Thursday has kept no suspect tradition of them. The only man who might have denied the yarn as afterward coloured in local legend—and incidentally a libel on his own memory—was the pilot who had her in charge. And he never came back, drunk or sober. But the records declare that about four o'clock of a fair enough morning, wind and sea then running high, the 2,000-ton *Fernshawe* went clear off her course among the graveyards where a coral ledge stripped her plates as neatly as a butcher's knife lays open a carcass. She sank inside of five minutes, and her survivors were hurried.

Neither has any one ever told the true adventures of the *Fancy Free,* the flash little lugger that happened somehow to be missing from week-end rendezvous at the same hour. Her crew were mostly inarticulate, and those who might have talked of strange comings and goings were "black fella boy know nothing." Her passenger spent the night praying in the bilge; and as for her commander, he left no report. But it is equally certain that when the next dawn spread the irisdescence of a pigeon's breast over those empty waters it struck out the hull and spars of Captain Wetherbee's vessel, anchored fair between the tips of two sunken masts.

Captain Wetherbee himself straddled the deck in

diving rig, and while a native helper held ready his great gleaming copper helm he mocked a limp, bedraggled, white-faced creature that clung by the rail.

"You'll note for yourself, Brother Seldom," he was saying. "Not a trace of evidence. We've not been spied. The lantern is sunk. These poor cattle haven't a glimmer. Here are we, and there are the pearls, twenty thousand pounds' worth—just overside. Within three hours I'll be off on the pearling banks about my business, and I never heard of any lost steamer. Next week, or any time I choose, I'll be walking the streets of Thursday to hear the news. And who so surprised as Captain Wetherbee, that hard-working man? 'Honest' Wetherbee, with a fortune in his belt to dispose at leisure! . . ."

His pallid face took a diabolic glow in the first sun.

"Except yourself, of course," he added. "*You're* evidence. King's evidence. I'm not forgetting you. I'll even give you your chance. Are you coming, old 50 per cent.? Yes—down there! With me! Hell—what kind of adversary do you call yourself? Come on and share. Now's your time to get level and change your luck once for all. Fight it out with me—what? No? . . . Damn it, deacon, I thought you were going to be amusing. . . . I'll knock your silly head in when I come back."

He climbed to the ladder, but a final odd fancy occurred to him, a parting twist to the other's torment; and he summoned the big negro mate.

"You see that fella white man? Mebbe he wants to go below—good; you give him that other suit. Mebbe he raises hell or touches the pump; you knock seven bells out of him. Otherwise no order. You savee?"

Buttermilk saveed with a vacant grin.

There hung for a moment after the helmet had been locked a single-eyed and monstrous red ghoul of the sea that presently lowered itself and sank. . . .

Wetherbee landed easily on the boat deck of the *Fernshawe* well away aft. It was hardly bright enough as yet above him, and he had to feel his path a foot at a time in sombre green twilight. Quick fishes steered to and fro about him, silent and curious witnesses of this invasion. He gave no heed; he had no care of sharks or diamond fish or any possible danger, too intent on his errand, too elate and confident.

Balancing on his hands like an acrobat, he crawled over the edge, down to the main deck, and began to explore forward.

In one hand he held a short and heavy steel crowbar, with a fine ground tip. In the other he drew the coils of his life line and air tube. They lengthened after him as he entered by the main companion, passed the door to the saloon, and up a long, dark passage to a thwartship corridor. There, as he had known from a vague and general familiarity with its plan, was the door to the steamer's strong room. The lock proved a trifle in the nip of his powerful jemmy. . . .

When he groped out into the passage, twenty minutes later, he carried, slung to his belt, a sagging canvas bag.

It seemed to him that the ship must have moved in the interval of his search. Some shifting of cargo or fracture of the coral supports had tilted her sharply by the stern. He walked down a noticeable slope, and half-way he met a dead man, sliding on an upward current.

The stranger bobbed into him and went asprawl like

a clumsy and apologetic passer-by. His sightless eyes peered into Wetherbee's with mild reproach. Wetherbee thrust him off, and he went bowing and spinning gravely on his course.

Wetherbee cared for no such matters. His nerve remained unshaken, his pulses calm, as befitted a man who had played out the end of a difficult game to rewarded success. But as he resumed his retreat down the passage he caught a glimpse of something surely quite as human and lively as himself.

The light was somewhat stronger now and flooding in through the side panel made a kind of proscenium of the landing by the main companionway. And in that space he descried a dim form facing him there, looking toward him : a man as tall as himself, clad like himself in diving rig—like himself in polished copper helmet. He knew only two helmets of that particular shape and colour. One he wore. The other he had left on the deck of the *Fancy Free*, his spare diving gear. No man of his crew ever could have worn it, for none of them used an apparatus. Therefore he knew that Deacon Selden had come down after all to dispute the prize with him and to claim vengeance on the spot.

He exulted ; he could have wished it so and no otherwise. He had meant to kill Selden anyhow. But this was the time and the place and the manner to kill him ; a manner to match and to complete his crime as an artistic achievement. One blow on the helmet would crush the fellow's eardrums. And leave no trace—no trace at all ! He could bear the body quite openly to Port Kennedy, and even inter it with honours for an unfortunate hand who had died in the line of duty. No trace. Everybody outgeneralled, duped, and defeated and himself free as air.

And the cream of it was: Selden was going to fight! He saw that when he took a stride and the other moved up with him. He stretched out a hand to steady for a rush. So did the other. He swung up his armed fist. The other did the like. . . .

Laughing loud inside his casque, he flung the bar above his head, and went to meet the adversary in crashing impact.

Meanwhile, above in the sunshine, on the deck of the *Fancy Free*, a limp and wild-eyed gentleman, who had once been deacon in his far past, continued to call abroad with prayerful fervour, if any help might come:—

"The wicked man lieth in wait secretly as a lion. . . . Lo, he hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: he hideth his wrong in his heart. . . . Let him be snared in his own pit: in the net which he hid is his own foot taken. . . . Lord, break Thou the arm of the wicked and the evil man. . . ."

And when the first luggers came flying from Port Kennedy to the scene of the wreck and the first investigators went below, they found the lifeless body of Captain Wetherbee, the only honest man who had ever come to Thursday Island by sea, who had been drowned there: impaled among the shards and splinters of a broken mirror that had served to mask a saloon door aboard the murdered Brisbane steamer.

THE WICKS OF MACASSAR

A NATURALIST, by what Andrew Harben told me, is a man that goes around looking for things that happen by nature. The more natural they are the better pleased is he. And some day if he looks far enough he's liable to fetch up against something that just naturally makes a meal off him and he goes looking no farther.

Anyway, this is what I gathered from Andrew Harben. He's all right now and when last I saw him he was pounding chain cables by the Cape Town breakwater—such being the most denatured employment he could find. But he used to be a naturalist himself and interested in most curious facts like bugs and poison plants and wild animals, until once they brought him so close to an unnatural finish that they cured him for all time to come. . . .

" Keep away from it," says Andrew Harben, giving me advice while he chipped the rust flakes lovingly into my eyes. " Whenever you have a feeling that you'd like to be a great scientific investigator and discover what's none of your business," he says, " go and pry into a keg of dynamite with a chisel. It's quicker and more homelike. But leave the strange places and the strange secrets of the earth to university professors and magazine writers, they being poor devils and

mostly so scrawny that nothing would bite them anyway. You mightn't believe I once went around sampling rocks and fleabites and tribal customs and things in all kinds of queer corners. I did," he says, " but I do not any more. And yet I made one remarkable scientific discovery before I quit. It is a valuable fact in nature and I will hand it to you for what it's worth, free gratis."

Which he did, and I'm doing the same.

It was while his ambition was young and strong that Andrew Harben took a job from the Batavia Government to watch a screw-pile light by the Borneo shore of Macassar. His tastes running as they did, you go to admit his judgment, no other place around the earth having quite so much nature laid on to the square inch. Mud and mangroves and sloughs and swamps make a cosy home that suits a lot of queer inhabitants, mostly of a kind you and me would be highly wishful to avoid. But Andrew Harben he opened up his specimen cases and set out his little pickle bottles full of alcohol and was happy, laughing quite humorous to himself at the idea of getting paid thirty guilders a month for such a privilege.

The lantern at Andrew Harben's light must have been brought out by the first Dutch navigator. A great iron scaffolding in the middle of his shack held a tub of oil. Then there were eight flat wicks that led up through a perforated sheet of iron from the oil tub, each cropping out overhead by an old-fashioned thumbscrew feed. And around the wicks was built the eight-sided glass cupola. Yes, it was a kind of over-grown street lamp of a light, but mighty important in those waters just the same.

The keeper's business was to have the oil tub always

full and to climb around and give the thumbscrews a twist every hour of the night. So long as he kept his wicks trimmed and burning nobody cared what else he did on the side. The skipper of the lighthouse tender that landed Andrew Harben made this clear.

" Z' last mans what lifed there got eats by z' crocodile," he said. " All but z' feets of one, which we buried. Zat wass awright, only zey let z' lights go out and zere wass wrecks. Oh, such wrecks because of zese dam currents. Now, please, if you got mad, be so good to stay anyways by z' lights until we bring anozzer mans, if it is all z' same to you."

" Don't worry about me," said Andrew Harben, who was a big, hearty chap. " I shan't go mad, no fear. The poor fools probably hadn't enough brains to keep from rattling loose. You see, I'm a scientist, I shall explore the wonders of natural history. My work here in Borneo shall make me famous and, who knows, may make my fortune as well. There was Philson, who found how the nipa palm can be made to yield pure maple syrup at a cost of one cent per gallon, and Biggins, who learned that the distilled juice of the female mustard spider is a specific for the pip—both humble investigators like myself. No. I'll have enough to keep me busy, never fret."

" Yes," remarked the skipper, a most intelligent half-caste, Andrew Harben told me, being educated at the Agricultural School at Buitenzorg, " yes, I zink maybe you will. So you are a natural 'istory ? In zat case a crocodile may not like your flaviour, you zink ? Perhaps you are right. I will stop back in a month to see if zis iss z' truth ? "

" How many men have held this job ? " asked Andrew Harben.

"Oh, I 'ave forgot 'ow many," said the skipper, with a face like wood, which is the custom of half-castes when they lie.

Andrew Harben might have lived ashore if he'd wanted, because there was a plank walk set on steel screw-piles that led from the lighthouse right into the mangroves. But he preferred the idea of sitting out there in the evenings to watch the monkeys and the crabs play along the mud flats by the river mouth. This shack was his box seat.

He was so took up with getting settled in the new roost that he never thought to overhaul his supplies till the skipper was gone. Grub and oil were all right, he found, but one thing was all wrong. Those eight wicks that fed the lights had been used up short. Even when he filled the tub level he hadn't more than an inch to spare all around. And there wasn't an extra wick in the place.

Andrew Harben ran out and yelled at the tender that was just heading up for Mangkalihat, but he couldn't make them hear, and the skipper thought he was only passing compliments.

So he was, in a way, being sore. This thing about the wicks was just blamed carelessness on the part of the three Dutch marines who had held the place temporary to his arrival. Also it was likely to prove expensive to shipping and a lot of trouble to him. "How the devil can I keep those footy little lights going for a month without no wicks?" said Andrew Harben.

The more he looked and thought the less he liked it. Macassar is a regular cross-roads. Junks from Kwangchow toddle by after sandalwood and birds' nests, and

country wallahs go smelling their way—and smelling is right—around to Banjermasin after benzoin and rice, and tramps of all breeds with Australian coal and ironwood, and topsail schooners with anything at all from pepper to dead Chinamen—a parade like Collins Street of an afternoon.

Andrew Harben considered, and he saw what a mess he would start thereabout if he ever let his lights go out. It made him peevish, because he hadn't come to be bothered with such matters, and he started to piece out those wicks. All he could find in the way of stuff was his socks. He tied them on to the loose ends of the wicks, and they drew oil all right, but he only had six, being a frugal man in his habits. Not another thing could he rummage up around the shack to help him, no yarn, nor twine, nor goods of any kind.

"Shall we be stuck by such naturalistic obstacles?" said Andrew Harben, and he took his pants, which were canvas, and hacked them with a knife. By ravelling off about four inches from each leg he got enough cotton thread to patch the other two wicks with. It left him kind of high-watered, you might say. Yes, he was well ventilated around his ankles, and not having any more socks to his feet he was going to be quite cool. But the strait was safe for the time, and he could now turn his attention to real business.

He used to start easy every morning on his natural history by digging out a few billions of dead moths that had snowed in his lights all night. Then he'd hurry ashore over his plank bridge and collect snails and fuzzy worms and similar crawlers by the tide mark. Later he'd work into heavier stuff—bats and leeches

and centipedes and such like fascinating reptiles—or maybe dodge a panther or a wild pig or a boa constrictor in the jungle. Finally he'd taper off on ticks, which took to him most amazing, and fire ants and scorpions and mosquitoes as big as your finger. If there is one thing more evident than another in Borneo it's insects, and Andrew Harben did say he often swum home at dusk through solid waves of them. Taking that as meant, you can still see he would be by no means lonesome.

And pretty soon he had company of another kind too, being native. These were a tribe of simple Bugis that lived infrequent through the back country in a state of innocence you would hardly imagine, and they were very hairy and most friendly to Andrew Harben, which was queer. One family had a hang out near the river, and it wasn't long before old Allo and his seven sons were serving him in all kinds of little ways. As soon as they understood his idea about animals and specimens they took a highly informing interest, Andrew Harben said.

They knew a good deal about natural history in their own way, and they gave him spiders and adders and things like that, very nice and all particular deadly. One day they took him into the jungle and introduced him to a caterpillar that drops off the trees on you so its hairs stick in your skin. Andrew Harben was swelled with pride at this invention. But that night the poison festered and he swelled in another manner. He had sense enough to lock himself in the shack so as to keep from jumping in the drink when the fever took him. Those caterpillars very near finished Andrew Harben, but he managed to keep the lights going and the Bugis came around to call next morning so kind and

sympathetic. They were most neighbourly, the Bugis.

"Ya—ya," they said, which was Dutch in a fashion and meant anything you like—such as buck up, old scout; the worst is yet to come.

They told him about a harmless snake that carried a superfluous or third eye in its back. He went hunting that curious snake and found it, but he didn't like the look of its head. It had a broad head with a button on the neck that might or might not have been an eye. Of course he could not doubt when old Allo and all his seven sons assured him positively that the snake was safe as a tame kitten. But just for luck he grabbed it cautiously and gave it a glass tube to chew on while he pressed the button.

"Ya—ya!" said the tribe—meaning who so surprised as them—and when Andrew Harben came to examine the tube he found enough venom to kill forty men, which was doing pretty well for one harmless little snake. . . .

Yes, business was good, but pretty soon he had to worry about his wicks again. The socks were about used up, and socks never give a good light anyhow, Andrew Harben said. He'd been ravelling off his pants for more splices until he blushed to look at himself. This was painful to his modesty but worse for his comfort, on account of giving up so much protection. Every time he stripped off another inch of pant leg he opened up new territory for the insects which took to his bare limbs quite joyously.

Andrew Harben began to wonder where it would end and what he would do when he had no more pants to ravel. The way these lights burned up wicks was scandalous, and the tender wasn't due back for more

than a week yet. He tried to get help from the Bugis, but he couldn't seem to make them understand. They didn't carry socks themselves, nor pants neither, nor much of anything but their long hair which they wore braided in a kind of club behind.

"Am I a scientist?" said Andrew Harben. "And can I not wrest the answer I need from nature herself?"

It cheered him up a lot to think of it that way. He remembered how other investigators had condescended to useful discoveries like imitation shoe buttons and synthetic doormats and Kennebunk sealskins.

"I will find a new material for lamp wicks," he said, "thus endearing myself to posterity as well as saving the lives of the merchant marine."

So he tested all manner of strange stuff in a most scientific manner, like coir and palm fibres and grapevines and corn silk. But it wasn't any use. He couldn't get anything that would sop up oil and hold a light for half a minute. He was still cursing his luck and thinking hard things of science when the Allo family showed up with a piece of news that made him forget all the rest in a hurry. It seems they had located a flying frog in the depths of the jungle.

Now few people have ever seen the flying frog of Borneo, and those who have are called nasty names by those who haven't. It wears a skin web between its fore and hind legs and is most rare. Andrew Harben was grateful because here he saw his big chance for fame. He would pickle the beast and write a book about it to make the university professors and the magazine writers sit up. And maybe if the statements were tough enough and somebody attacked him for a

nature faker he might get the use of half a dozen new letters to the hind end of his name.

So he went out with the Allo tribe once again and they led him up a creek to the place where the flying frog lives. Sure enough there was a frog; he saw it quite clear. He only had to hop across on a log and take it in his little net. He hopped and the log turned under him, as was likely it would, being no log at all but a most monstrous great alligator. Andrew Harben went overboard, and the Bugis raised a yell.

"Ya—ya!" they said, meaning here's fun.

But Andrew Harben could dive as well as an alligator, which he did and got away downstream. This was the first time he could be thankful about his pants. They were now no bigger than a swimming suit, and he struck out with great speed and finally reached shore below with the loss of nothing but one shoe, which the alligator did not like.

Going back alone through the jungle, he lost his way and along toward evening what should he do but stumble plump on the whole nest of Allos where they lived. This was a place highly interesting to an investigator and would have been even more so to the little gunboats of different flags that police the sea. It was no hut but a proper palace, with a stockade and towers and flagpoles all complete and every blessed thing about it snaffled off some ship or other.

He saw strakes, beams, keelsons, masts, rigging, and cabin doors enough to build a fleet with; and the windows were ports and chimneys all funnels. The women were cooking dinner in pots made of ships' bells turned upside, and they were dressed in yards

and yards of Chinese silks all watered impromptu by sea water, and lace curtains from some captain's berth and various other flotsam, while the little children toddled around in American flour bags. Yes, those Allos could wear plenty of garments when they were home, which was good manners, but more particularly indicated they'd collected so much wealth they didn't know what else to do with it.

There were two great carved figureheads guarding the gate, and Andrew Harben even saw the name under one of them, a most calm and beautiful white face looking down on this rascal crew. *Witch of Dundee*, it said. And where was the *Witch of Dundee* now, and where all the hearty men who sailed with her? Gone down in Macassar long since. Here were her bones, what was left, and for theirs the monkeys would be rolling them on the mud flats at low tide. . . .

Well, Andrew Harben saw these things and he understood quick enough that the kindly Bugis were no more than wreck pirates who drove a rich trade whenever for any good and sufficient reason the light failed. They must have been at it for years, very quiet and cautious so the keepers would have plenty of time to go mad and get eaten by the crocodile, as the skipper said. Of course they would not kill the keepers in any uncrafty way lest the news should get out and spoil their graft, and a white man with a spear through him is hard to keep secret underground in any native country.

However, they would have made an exception of Andrew Harben. They spied him standing there in the dusk, and they knew their game was up unless they nailed him. They chased him hard through the

swamps, but he gave them the slip and reached home a jump ahead. They were not anxious to follow while he could sweep the bridge with his fowling piece and so they stood on the shore and howled.

"Ya—ya!" they said, meaning damn him.

Andrew Harben was the angry man. He'd been pretty much fed up with natural history by this time. About everything that flew or crawled in Borneo had sampled him, and he was bit and stung all over. Meanwhile he considered the wickedness of these Bugis that had been carrying on serial murder here all unbeknownst and how nearly they had added him to the score by playing him for a scientist and a sucker. And he considered too that he was now shut off from all help in the matter of the lights and what a responsibility of life and property rested on him to keep them going.

"When I thought of that," he said, telling me, "—when I thought of that I jumped up and fired into the trees till the gun was too hot to hold. Curse 'em. D'you know I had to take what was left of my pants to patch up the wicks that night?"

He would have given all the honorary letters of the alphabet for the use of a rifle, but he might have saved his rage, for the Bugis minded bird shot not at all. They only danced in the mangroves and mocked him. "Ya—ya!" they said, which meant they'd get him yet. . . .

He began to think so himself the next day when his water ran out. The tender was due in three more days. He thought his wicks might last that long, with nursing. But he would be dead a dozen times over with thirst.

After a blazing torture along toward evening he

couldn't stand it any more. The woods were quiet, and there was just a chance that the enemy were napping. He took a pail and sneaked ashore over his bridge to the water barrel under the mangroves that they had always kept filled for him. It seemed they must have forgot to cut off supplies—the barrel was brimming. He drunk a pailful on the spot and started back with another, and he got as far as his shack before he collapsed, all curled up in knots quite picturesque. Those simple Bugis had dosed the water with a native drug made from the klang berry.

Now, it is a singular thing about klang, as Andrew Harben told me, that it will mostly kill a brown man and seldom a white, but if it does not it sends him crazy. By that he meant crazy in the Malay way, which is quite different. The klang did not kill Andrew Harben. It laid him cold at first, and for many hours he lay without sense or speech.

When he came to he was stretched in a corner of the shack. The cupola overhead was dark and the shack was dark except for one tiny dish lamp on the floor, and around and about squatted the tribe of Allo having a high old time.

They were naked, being hopeful of a chance to swim before the night was done, and they smelt like swine. A big wind was rising in the strait and the waves roared and bubbled underneath among the piles, while the Bugis watched for results. By ways of keeping their patience they were at the pickle bottles, being hindered not at all by the curious specimens therein and highly pleased with the alcohol. It is another singular thing that if klang was not made for a white man alcohol was never made for a brown.

Andrew Harben roused up in the corner where they'd chucked him, meaning to feed him to the usual alligator for breakfast. He saw them sitting there and celebrating so very joyful, and he saw something else. Through the smother off to windward toward Celebes he saw the twinkle of at least two ships standing off and on most bewildered and marked for their graves among the reefs and currents they couldn't place. These ships were going down to his account because his lights were out. And meanwhile the Bugis were sitting around and tearing up the lantern wicks.

Yes, that was just what they were doing. They had taken out the wicks so there should be no more light that night at any price. They had snaffled the poor little shreds that Andrew Harben had made at the expense of decency—his wicks, his precious wicks! They tossed the strands about, and the wind snatched them away inland into howling space, and the Bugis laughed.

"Ya-ya!" they said, which means good business.

Andrew Harben rose up all so quietly in his corner. Did I tell you he was a fine, big man? He was, and they were also eight fine, big men—old Allo and his seven sons. Before they noticed, he was able to reach his shot-gun. It was empty, but he wanted nothing, only the barrels, which furnished a short and very hefty club. What happened after that nobody can say exactly. Which perhaps is just as well, for it could not have been a pretty thing to see. But Andrew Harben, who was crazed with klang, ran amuck among the Bugis, who were crazed with alcohol, and most queer were the doings in the lighthouse by Macassar. And when morning came there was no wreck in that strait.

"So you have not got mad," said the half-caste skipper when he climbed up to the shack in the smoky dawn two days ahead of time. Then Andrew Harben came out to meet him, wearing few impediments to speak of and not much skin neither; so he added: "Anyways, you have not been eats by z' crocodile."

"No," said Andrew Harben, all unashamed.

"*Zat* iss awright, but my God why did you not show your light till midnight?" asked the skipper. "I tell you I wass out zere last night and z' light wass dark and z' devil walking abroad on z' waters. Almost, almost we went ashore with zese dam currents. But just as we would run on z' Poi Laut reef you lit up again. Not one little minute too soon did you show z' light? Why iss zis?"

"I lost my wicks!" said Andrew Harben, quite cool.

"Lose z' wicks?" shouted the skipper. "For why have you lose z' wicks? Did you find zem again?"

"Come and see," said Andrew Harben.

He took the skipper into the shack where the lights in the cupola were still burning broad and yellow. They were eight in number, as I said before, and no man ever saw the like of them before nor will again. For every light there hung a Bugis from the iron framework by the long hair of his head. One lock of his hair held him up. The rest was twisted into a cue and looped so that it floated in the oil tub and then passed through a burner.

By the hand of Andrew Harben that did it, those eight Bugis were the wicks of Macassar that kept the strait clear!

Meanwhile Andrew Harben went whistling about his work, climbing around the frame and trimming all so careful and moving the thumbscrews a bit here and there and ladling oil in a gourd to keep the flow rising well.

"I have made a remarkable discovery," he said. "It is a fact in nature that human hair can be used for a lamp wick. Of course you have to keep wetting it, for hair will not draw oil fast enough by capillary action. But it serves." . . .

The skipper looked at the Bugis and looked around at the broken pickle bottles and the scattered specimen cases and the other remnants, and the skipper understood partly, being a highly intelligent man for a half-caste.

"Zis," he said, "*zis* is mos' natural. Only it iss no good for 'istory. You will never write z' natural 'istory of your great discovery, my friend, because it iss too dam natural for anybody to believe."

And he said true, and that's why I'm telling you the story free gratis as Andrew Harben told it to me, which you may write yourself if you've got the nerve. Andrew Harben he'll tell you the same if you find him hammering rust by the Cape Town breakwater. He's all right now, but for a long time after they took him away from Borneo he was just a little peculiar one way. It wasn't bugs nor snakes nor natives nor any such vermin that excited him, though you might think so. No, he was cured of all that. But whenever he chanced to see a lamp anywhere that was carelessly tended, spattering or smoking and the flame burning low and foul, then Andrew Harben would begin to carry on.

"Ya-ya!" he would yell, meaning why the devil don't you trim your wicks?"

Which, when you think of it, was no more than natural, as the skipper said.

DOUBLOON GOLD

I REMEMBERED the big chap with the china-blue eyes and the great mop of tangled fair hair. I had seen him one night, a month or so before, at Monte Carlo, where he wound up a run against the red by snapping the sovereigns off his cuff links. And here, in the Casino Pavao, at Funchal, I remarked him in almost the identical gesture. He fumbled through all his pockets before he found and tossed out upon the board a gold piece, broad and ruddy as his own open-air face. Now, as then, I saw him summon his last reserve for a final plunge. The coin fell on *manque*, and there he let it lie.

We were in charge of a highly-superior banker at that table—a model banker, a window model of a banker, with spade-cut beard, jet brows, waxen face, and perfectly faultless armour of full dress. Throughout the evening he had been spinning the wheel and shooting the little marble along its saucer rim with the detached regularity of an automaton. But when this strange token dropped shimmering beside him he stood like one transfixed, then bent over to stare, and presently passed a signal to the fat croupier across from him. And both of them stared at the thing, which shone like a full moon on the smooth green pool of the table.

I was not so sure of the rest. But it seemed to me

that a sudden flame lighted their professionally indifferent eyes, that the spark of some swift excitement leaped between them. I say I could not be sure, because I was tiptoe with eagerness myself.

Nobody else was paying any noticeable attention to the big gambler or to his fortunes. A silent crowd jostled stiffly about the board, three deep, unmindful of the heat, the puddled air, the aching blue-white lights—a cosmopolitan crowd, such as one finds in the season at a minor cross-roads like Madeira, where types are varied, if not extreme.

There was the English invalid contingent, of course —the prop and frigid corrective of so many sub-tropical resorts; and the local social element, dark, dapper and Portuguese, playing a wary and penurious stake; and the casual commercial, chiefly Teuton, playing high and stolidly; and the whole hodge-podge of chance tourists from the steamers in port—South Americans, South Africans, lean and yellowish administrators from the West Coast, one or two frock-coated Arabs with the fez, Spaniards from Canary, and Hebraic gentlemen from the ends of the earth. In short, a Casino crowd, solely intent upon the game, and restrained from any common human sentiment like curiosity by its own multiplied strangeness.

And I rejoiced that this was so; for I desired no competition, and I meant to get that big gambler's big gold piece, one way or another.

"*Faites vos jou'!*" The banker had recovered sufficiently to make his spin, droning with guttural accent the familiar phrase: "*Faites jou', mess'h!*"

I suppose every traveller likes to esteem himself rather a dab at collecting. How else account for the populations that live by the sale and the manufacture

of assorted relics? I had lugged a bag of ancient coins half round the world, and I desperately wanted that particular coin, so large, so curious—and genuine —being offered as a bet. But there was something more to my temptation.

The day had been tinged for me with the charm and colour of this Old World island town, lying like a flower wreath on a mailed breast, with its rioting gardens, its twining streets, its grim basalt barriers and savage beaches. I felt the lure of authentic adventure in pursuing such a memento, a gold piece possibly historic, stamped with the flourish of dead kings. One has the sense at times of spying from ambush upon a promise of emprise and some great gain. It is the glamour of things, a magic flush on dull and sordid fact. It starts up anyhow, at a face, a whisper, a strain of music—a stock quotation. True, in the present state of a fallen world it often proves counterfeit—and expensive, too often. But what of that? One follows still; if only for the sake of the story. . . .

"*Faites vos jou'!*" advised the banker, who himself presided over romantic possibilities at a dollar a throw.

By the judicious use of an elbow I worked my way through the press. There fell the usual interval of suspense while the marble circled low. It gave me my chance to lean over the shoulder of the big gambler, who sat glowering and expectant, and to murmur in his ear.

"I'll take it up for ten pounds," I offered.

He nodded, without so much as looking at me; and I dropped five American eagles beside his stake. . . .

"*Rien ne va plus!*"

But I had already effected my exchange; and I

snatched away the big gold piece just as the marble struck, hopped, and rattled into a socket.

"*Vint e uno,*" announced the banker, surprised into his own native tongue; and I caught the unmistakable quiver of a live disappointment as his glance crossed mine with the flash of a knifeblade.

The gambler waited until a silver rake had swept away his eagles. With a visible effort, then, he braced himself against the table and rose. He turned to me, met my smirk of triumph with a frown, and ploughed out of the throng to the natural refuge, the little bar-room on the terrace side, where I followed him quite shamelessly.

The hour was early; we had the place to ourselves as we pledged each other in the quaint device they call a cocktail at the Pavao.

"You made a good bargain," he said, setting down his glass. "There must be at least twenty-five dollars' worth of pure gold in that slug if there's a penny—let alone its curio value."

His manner had a rough edge. Any one who has lost over the green cloth knows the spleen it can raise against all reason. I was the better pleased next instant when he broke through with a smile of sound good nature:

"Here's hoping it brings you better luck than mine."

I liked that smile, and the voice, easy and true as a bell, and the whole hearty, big-boned cast of him; and I marvelled what twist had made a splendid great fellow like this, with his arching chest and walking-beam breadth of shoulder, the hanger-on at unhealthy gaming rooms. He was neither old nor young enough to be merely foolish. Forty would be about his age, I

judged; but his eyes were new, like those of a child, and the only marks about them were the little sun crinkles of outdoor living.

"You were willing to sell," I reminded him with a half-query.

"Of course!" he nodded. "When the game gets me running I'd stake my shoes if I could sell 'em. And ten pounds was more than the bank would have paid. All the same, you've got a rare piece, cheap."

"Just what have I got?"

"A doubloon—don't you know? One of those queer Portuguese cart wheels. Sink it! I made sure I'd found a lucky at last—anybody would."

I echoed that glorious old word:

"A doubloon?"

"Aye!" He smiled again. "Pieces of eight—what? The pirates used to cut throats for 'em."

On sudden impulse I risked a small experiment.

"I've no wish to profit by your misfortune," I said. "This is evidently very valuable . . . Call the ten pounds a loan."

He glanced at the coin as I laid it before him; and then, with a widening of pupil, at me. I was startled to see him hesitate.

"No," he decided. "No. But look here, that's decent of you. I will say it's downright decent."

"Not at all," I protested virtuously. "It might be worth many times what I paid you."

"That wouldn't worry me."

But something was worrying him as he frowned down at the golden disk. I felt a trouble on the man that bit deeper than his losses. He had an odd, abrupt trick of passing a hand hard over his brow as if to brush away some constant irritation, a gesture at once

naïve and passionate. At such times he looked about him with an uneasy air, puzzled and, I could almost say, resentful.

"You must be very much attached to the thing," I persisted.

He slid it back to me brusquely, with a jab of his forefinger.

"Thanks. Would you mind putting it out of sight?"

We were sitting at one of the small tables that lined the side of the little room. It so chanced that I sat facing the bar, which was not a proper bar at all but a long, low sideboard, whereon an attendant compounded drinks. My new friend was at my left and thus failed to see what now I saw—a detached head glaring out of the wall, sharp and definite as a cameo. I was slow to connect this singular phenomenon with a strip of mirror over the sideboard and regarded it merely with wonder, for the face was very much alive, convulsed and eager. Tardily, then, I recognized the jet spade-beard of the superior banker, and at the same moment felt a hot breath stirring in my back hair.

"Hallo!" I exclaimed, and spun round in time further to recognize a pair of perfect coat-tails; they were just disappearing through the doorway into the *salle* behind me.

He could not have had ten seconds' start, but when I reached the doorway the fellow had vanished in a fringe of bystanders. Another banker, bald-headed and not in the least superior, was now in charge at roulette, and I noticed that the fat croupier had also been replaced.

I turned back to the attendant at the bar, a pop-eyed nondescript in a white jacket.

"Who was that?" I demanded indignantly. "Who is that man, and what the devil did he mean by blowing down the back of my neck?"

He stared at me, with fluttering lids, chalk-faced—I was to appreciate presently what terror rode that obscure soul.

"*Não compriendo*," he stammered, though I had heard him use good enough English of a sort in wheedling for tips. Impatient at his stupidity and my own jumpy nerves, I flung away from him—or, rather, I started to fling and was halted there in my tracks. . . .

Now the contact of a revolver is something that no man need be taught to identify. It is a part of instinctive knowledge. When a hard blunt nose snuggled suddenly under my lowest rib I required no verbal order to make me stand quite passive and obedient. So I did stand, while still mechanically resisting the furtive, tremulous fingers that came stealing round my wrist, trying to force my hand open.

I was not half so frightened as amazed, and certainly not half so frightened as the creature himself. I knew it must be the wretched little attendant who was tickling me with that revolver, and that he was trying to hold me up for something—what it might be I scarcely thought. If he had been respectable in any way through strength or skill or personality, I believe I might have yielded. But to be robbed by this miserable hireling, this pop-eyed dispenser of bad cocktails, himself in a state of the most abject funk, roused all the stubbornness of which I was capable. As if a sheep had assaulted me!

I suppose I should have allowed myself to be shot ingloriously had not the big gambler discovered what was going on. In two steps he was by me, pouched

the weapon with a fist like a muff, and simply abolished Pop-eye. . . .

"Easy now!" he warned him. "Don't yell!" It was an absurd anticlimax to see that bold, bad gunman being jammed upright to keep him from falling in a heap. "Repose yourself, matey, if you know what's good. Be quiet—comprendo so much? Nobody's going to hurt you."

Somehow I found myself back at the little table. The gambler occupied the chair at my right this time, whence he could watch my late enemy, who hung collapsed over the bar. Except for these trifling changes, the whole incident might have seemed illusion.

"What was that for?" I managed to ask.

The gambler answered with a negligence that struck me in my condition of mind like an affront:

"Well, the lad's of no importance—don't you see? He had to do what he was told and he wasn't up to his job—that's all. But I thought we'd best keep him in view. No sense having him run off to report."

"How true!" I said with a faint attempt at emulation. "One concedes the frivolity of having the lad run off to report. After all, he could only confess that he had failed to murder me. But suppose I do it?"

"What—complain?"

"It occurs to me I might. I'm not vindictive, but I really don't care for pistols with my drinks."

"To whom?"

"Why, to the manager, I suppose; the maestro—the man who holds the gambling concession in this place."

"That's the johnny with the beard. He would be pleased to get a complaint from you!" he snorted. "Why, it was he that gave this poor fool his orders!"

" Oh ! " I said, for lack of more adequate comment.

" And he, again, is only a lesser devil. And if you should call the police, or the military, or anybody, all the way up—the governor himself—you'd probably find the same."

I regarded him to know whether he was serious. He was ; and his laconic method of statement had an extraordinary effect of bitterness. Action had lent him relief, but the cloud of some fixed discontent dwelt in his strong soul. Even as I watched, its shadow descended upon him again.

" From your account they seem prepared to spare no pains in making the visitor feel quite at home," I observed—" up to the point of inducing him to remain permanently. . . . Was there any other object in the recent attention to me, do you think ? "

" You've got it in your hand."

I unclenched my hand and sat blinking down, with some astonishment, at the thing I had held throughout and was still holding—the Portuguese doubloon. His smile was grim this time.

" Pieces of eight—what ? They used to cut throats for 'em."

" Who wants the thing so badly ? " I asked squarely. " Who's after it ? "

" Number One," was his cryptic answer.

" Number One ! " I cried. " Which Number One ? "

" Do you think I'm trying to mystify you ? " he returned impatiently. " Look here—I've had that confounded relic only since yesterday myself. They tried these same tricks on me until I got tired and wrung a little yellow viper's ears for him. . . . Well, Number One wants it. Number One is the cause, the source, the trouble maker, for whose sake they move. I'm

telling you every bit he could tell me—just that: Number One."

I drew a long breath. Adventure—romance? The most hardened realist must have admitted that here was a promising lead. From the opened windows on the terrace came a stealthy, sudden rush of rain, confusing and drowning the fret of the sea below. The curtains flapped inward and we had a whiff of the island night, warm and damp, charged with the heady scents of lush vegetation. Back in the ball-room they were starting a waltz of Waldteufel's, I think it was, some jingly strain that ran with the clink of money on the tables. A suitable setting for a wondrous tale; but it was borne upon me that if I wished full value for my venture I should have to play up now, and play up sharp.

This difficult man was not the kind to unbuckle off-hand. He was hardly what one might call a subjective pedlar of his wares. He would not care two pins for my thrills, my quest of fancy, which to him, in his own heavy obsession, must seem the most contemptible trifles.

With studied carelessness I took the doubloon on my thumb, flipped it and stuck it in my pocket.

"No wonder you were so willing to make a trade!" I said dryly. "One would say the liabilities outweigh the assets. As they have now descended to me, it remains to inquire whether they were honestly come by."

I had caught him fairly out of himself. He sat up as if stung, seemed ready to retort, and then yielded with a laugh—deep-throated tribute.

"You want an abstract of title?"

"My dear sir, I'm frank to say that's what I wanted

from the first. I remembered you from Monte Carlo, you see."

With his elbows on the table he pressed his hands over his eyes absently, in that singular mannerism he had; and when they were clear he searched me again, gauging my significance in some alien train of thought.

"You seem entitled to it," he acknowledged slowly, "if only by your cheek, you know Please note you came asking. I shouldn't care to punch your head later for calling me a liar." . . .

And this was the way I won his story at last.

"Do you happen to carry any good, live, working superstitions about you?" he began, and marked my blink of surprise. "No? It's a pity. Things must be so much simpler to a man who's satisfied to trust in laws outside himself and his own vision. A streak of fatalism, hey? What a comfort! No use kicking about anything—it's all been arranged for you. Or astrology, now: the stars were in the wrong house, which naturally accounts for Jemmy Jones being in the wrong pew. What-o, there's warm cheer for Jemmy!

"Why are you and I chumming here together on this hole-in-a-corner of an island, for instance, with no end of a silly yarn between us? Likely you'd much rather be somewhere and doing something else—I'm blessed, but I should. Yet here we are; and both our lives, from a world apart, have led us up to this very minute. Now, why? Coincidence maybe. Well, coincidence must be worked a bit threadbare explaining things for people.

"Take my own case: I was born in the Riverina of New South Wales, the back lots—sheep country.

That's where I belong—and look at me! Quite a gap to bridge—what? . . .

"My father went out there as a jackaroo, without a penny; and before he died he could ride straightaway all day across his own paddocks. Nothing ever turned him from his natural destiny, which was raising good sheep, and plenty of 'em. In twenty years I don't suppose he was off the station twice; it suited him. It would have suited me too. Roving and changing and mucking about in crowds—no; I was fed up with that when he sent me away to school. After his death I stepped into his place, of course, and I never had any notion except to carry on as he had done before me to the end of my billet. Never any notion up to a day about three months ago, when there came a cablegram from England.

"Well, it's what I say—a man is better off if he has some simple and handy system of accounting for life. He goes to bed in his own private heaven and he wakes up in the general hell. And what's the reason? There isn't any, unless you believe in black cats or astral influence, or the curse of Shielygh—or something.

"That cablegram was to inform me that my father had left another family back home. Previous, so to speak. Previous and legitimate. Naturally everything he's acquired in Australia in near half a century belonged to them: the stock; the land; the house I was born in; the very picture of my mother on the wall—everything but me, being an encumbrance on the estate. . . . A fair knockout, wasn't it?"

His voice held the level acerbity that no man with a boy's eyes has any right to know.

"Did I fight? I started to—rather! At first, you see, I didn't begin to understand what it was had hit

me. I took my two years' wages as overseer—I'd a right to that, at least—and I came on to England, with my comb over one eye, regularly scratching after trouble. And then I found the only people I could fight were three elderly gentlewomen who lived together in a Yorkshire lane in a little cottage covered with climbing roses. They were most polite and had me in to tea; and we talked about something—a sale of work in aid of the local church, I think. . . . At that it was rather heroic of them, you know. The entertainment of a new and unsuspected half-brother—sinister, hey?—must present difficulties to the maiden mind.

"I made none, of course. I saw their solicitor next day and helped straighten out his papers for him. After which I departed.

"The only thing I took away was a bit of family history."

Such was his blunt way of putting it; yet I was not so dull as to miss a glimpse of what it meant, the sacrifice he had made in his bitter grievance; the true and knightly spirit he must have shown toward those three innocent gentlewomen, so lightly and whimsically touched in his narrative.

At this point he paused and reached into the side pocket of his dinner jacket.

"Have you seen the guide-book they sell about the streets here," he asked—"the English Guide to Madeira?"

I blinked again at the abrupt transition, but his hand came away empty.

"Never mind," he resumed. "I'll show you something presently to surprise you. Meanwhile hark to the family record:

"It seems my people had inhabited their corner of

Yorkshire time out of mind. That's a common thing enough, a rural line rooted deep in the soil. But, what isn't so common, they've managed somehow to keep the precious old ancestral name alive and going —from the Ark, perhaps. Yeoman, franklin and squire, as they say, there is always a Robert Matcham above ground somewhere. Robert Matcham, the descendant of uncounted Robert Matchams—d'ye see? It was my father's name, and when he made his break to Australia the tradition was too strong for him: he never changed it—which explains how the solicitor came to trace him at last. You'd hardly call it a fortunate heirloom; but it's the only one I've got—my sole inheritance—for Robert Matcham happens to be my name as well."

He seemed to mean it as a sort of introduction, in spite of the discomfortable irony of his tone.

"It's now three months, as I tell you, since Nemesis or Belial or coincidence—whatever you like—began to play this scurvy joke on me. It hasn't quit yet. To what end, hey? What's it about? What's it damn well for? Perhaps that sounds like whining. Well, it's only whining for a chance to hit back at something or somebody. Wait till you've been caught up by the scruff and cuffed blind, as I've been, and no place to get your teeth in . . . Listen now:

"My one idea was to get a part of what I'd lost, money enough to buy a little place of my own away there in the bush, the only thing I cared about or knew. I needed a stake—not much, just a bit of a stake. An easy thing for an able-bodied man, you'd say. But could I get it? Well, I'm broke again as I sit here—you'll understand why your suggestion of a loan rather knocked the smoke out of me—and what

I've been through in trying makes a pitiful comedy.

" There was a syndicate undertook to send me out as managing partner on its big station in Victoria. They only required a deposit, which I paid ; and when I went round for the receipt that syndicate had vanished into thin air. I found a place with a wool merchant, who promptly failed. Twice I booked for Sydney on my own—missed one boat through a train wreck, and the other was libelled at the dockhead. I tried stowing away, and got as far as Havre before they threw me off.

" Gamble ? I gambled the way another man gets drunk—from exasperated craving, knowing the folly of it. Longchamp, Enghien, Monte Carlo—you follow my course ? Once and again I made a winning, but never quite enough ; and finally Monte Carlo left me flat. You say you saw me there ? Then you know how flat that was. At Marseilles I had to ship for mere bread on a friendly tramp going round to Lisbon.

" Now notice how a man is made to look like a monkey on a string. I didn't even know where that tramp was bound till she anchored in the Tagus. The same evening I got caught in a monarchist riot on the Rocio, had the clothes torn off me and landed in a cell. They released me next morning, with handsome apologies and a coat, not so handsome, which they said was mine. It wasn't ; mine was gone to rags. But in the lining of the one they gave me I found two Portuguese bills, and something else : a ticket by the Empreza Nacional steamer sailing for Madeira—within the hour ! I took it. My word ! What else was there to do ?

" You'll observe I never was in Madeira before—never meant or wanted to come here ; had hardly heard of the isle.

" I landed yesterday ; and perhaps you can guess the first thing I did in a place where horses are so plenty and so cheap. Man, I was crazy to get a saddle between my knees again—me that was raised in a saddle. So I hopped aboard the likeliest nag and rode for the open, out the coast—eastward, it seems. Why again should it be eastward ? I can't tell you ; but it was the way that offered, winding along between the mountains and the sea, where the lava rocks prop the sugar terraces, black and green in layers, and the blue water below. . . .

" Well, I rode on for an hour or more until the path led me down to the very edge of the tide, where I had rough going over a cobbled strand. At a certain place, which I need not describe, the girth slipped and I had to dismount to tighten it. And now, friend, I've brought you into the bit at last ; and you can draw your own moral, for it was there, standing almost in the wash, as I was——"

He seemed to hesitate on the phrase.

" You found the doubloon ? " I finished for him.

" Winking up at me from the beach like a yellow eye ! " he roared, and his big fist crashed upon the table and dropped a silence between us. I sat nonplussed.

" Nobody could blame you after that," I said, at length, " for thinking you had a lucky. As you tell it, the whole purpose of your Odyssey was the finding of that pocket piece."

I should have laughed—had I not chanced to meet his clear blue gaze fixed upon me with deadly candour.

" Is such your opinion ? " he asked.

" You were certainly justified in backing the thing for all you were worth," I answered lamely.

"I see I may have to punch your head after all." He smiled quietly. "I've no skill to show you how it struck me; that's the trouble."

He reached into his pocket again and this time brought out and flattened carefully before him, with his powerful, deliberate hands, a little red-bound pamphlet. "Then let me show you what I'd been reading along the way."

I took the pamphlet from him with expectation at low ebb. It was the guide-book to Madeira, a product of the local printer, I judged, thrown together to catch the coppers of the tourist trade. I took it, I say, rather sceptically, and glanced down the page to which he had folded; but before I had scanned the half a shock went through me. My incredulity vanished like mist in a wind. For here is what I read:

As for the discovery of this lovely island of Maderia, which is indeed a glorious pearl in the sea, it was probable in 1370; *but not by the Portuguese, which come much later. The first was discovered by sad accident by a lovely, oldest legend, by an Englishman named Robin à Machin, Roberto Machim, or Robert Matcham. He was a brave lover of a too beautiful woman to describe, named Anna d'Arfet, his dear love, which he could not marry because the enterprise was not recommended by the patrons.*

Hizory teaches us these two evaded together to establish in France and took shipment with a pilot captain friend named Pedro Morales, who was great fighting pilot of Spain. They delivered free on board and everything of best description, until the ship ran against a storm, which was indeed terrible. Many days they

blow where the Pilots could not say; and after varied assortment of trouble they came against this strange shore of Maderia and all wrecked. So perished in each others arms this famous love story, which are indeed a sad and lovely legend.

The pilot Pedro Morales exaped and went away to Portugal, where he told the King about this Island. So it was dixovered again by a navigator for the King, and always the populations since named the place Machico, after Robert Matcham and Anna d'Arfet, which died together on the shore.

I had no least desire left to laugh when I had finished, not even to smile at the method of the quaint chronicler through whose commercial phrase there penetrated such a heroic gusto of sentiment. Again and more subtly, more alluringly, I felt the presence of that valid marvel, the delightful fantasy of truth, for which no man ever quite outgrows the yearning. It was here, under my hand. . . .

" Where did you get this? " I demanded.

" Bought it from a hawker in the streets. Everybody buys 'em. They tell you the price of hammocks and seats in the theatre and where to get sugarcane brandy and ' article of native indus'ry ' "

" But is it true? "

" Quite true. Do you suppose I wouldn't go to the municipal library and see? You'll find it in all the history books, just as he says there—the local tradition about the discovery of Madeira."

" And you yourself are Robert Matcham ! " I murmured.

All the excitement was on my side. Except for his single outcry, with the vivid flash of colour it had lent,

he betrayed none. " Have you chanced to examine the coin yourself ? " he asked in his level voice.

I felt a kind of anger against him, that any chap with such a yarn should take such an indifferent way to spin it : and presently plucking out the doubloon and holding it under the lights, I came to the crowning wonder of all.

It was a rude bit of coinage, in size and weight considerably better than a double eagle, of a metal too soft to have long withstood the direct friction of the waves. An encrusted discoloration gave me a hint that it must have lain well bedded down ; the bright scratches told what recent battering it had suffered on the rocks. On the reverse I made out a coat of arms, almost obliterated ; but the obverse was clearer. It bore a profile head, with the titles of Fernando I, King of Portugal, and under that—the date.

" Thirteen-seventy," I read ; and repeated aloud with a gasp : " Thirteen-seventy ! Why—that's the very year ! "

He nodded slowly.

" Do you realize what this means ? " I cried at him. " In the same year this piece was minted a man of your own name set sail from England and was lost on these shores ! . . . It might easily have come with him—the ship was Spanish. It probably did come with him ! He may have owned this gold ; he may have held it, clinked it, gambled with it ! And now to be flung up out of the wreck, more than five hundred years afterward, not for the first comer to find, nor for just anybody, but for you—at your feet ! Do you get that ? "

" It figures out to fifteen generations, doesn't it ? " was all the answer he made.

" And the place—the place ! The book says they

still call it Machico. Was it there—is it possible it was there you found the coin ? "

" Within a stone's throw of the village itself."

I could only stare at him.

" Coincidence—what ? " said Robert Matcham grimly.

He folded up the little book and put it away without haste, and pressed his hand over his eyes again ; and suddenly the simplicity and passion of that action hit me like a blow. The man was seething. Within the stolid bulk of him lay pent a pit of emotion. He could not vent it ; as he said himself, he had no skill. But I saw how each casual word had come molten from its source and how immeasurably that very lack of art had added to its stark sincerity.

I sat back with a long sigh.

" Go on telling in your own fashion, please," I begged.

" There's little left to tell. I was rather muddled at first—I don't know that I'm much better now. But, all the same, it was stupid of me to flash the doubloon when I got back to Funchal. I didn't even know what the thing was, you see : and so I asked the first shopkeeper with an English sign at his door. You should have seen the rascal's eyes bulge. . . .

" It's clear enough I touched off a regular blessed conspiracy with that coin. What it means you can guess as well as I. I've had a pack of penny detectives on my trail ever since—the maestro here was dogging me all last night. I squeezed all I could out of one lad—how their head devil is called Number One. And that's all I know."

" But why should they be so eager after one doubloon ? "

"I don't believe they are so eager after one doubloon," he answered with slow emphasis.

" And what do you propose to do about it ? "

" Well, it's some time since I got any good of proposing anything much." I saw the lean muscles tighten along his jaw. " But I'm not dead yet." He glanced at his watch. " It's now eleven o'clock. I can get a horse up to midnight at the hotel. Before dawn I propose to take my morning plunge off the rocks, not far from the village of Machico."

" Alone ? " I demanded.

He looked at me oddly.

" Suppose you answer that yourself."

I sprang to meet his grip across the table, and thereby almost lost the use of my fingers.

" Come," he said as he rose, with his compelling smile on me ; " you're about the best coincidence I've met yet."

It was still raining when we climbed into a curtained bullock sled, one of those public conveyances that snatch the visitor over the pebbled streets of Funchal at a slithering speed of two miles an hour. The *carro* is hardly a joyous vehicle at the best of times. Well sat in close darkness, oppressed by an atmosphere of wet straw and leather, listening to the mimic thunder on the roof, the gibbering of the yoke pin and the wail of the driver, a goading fiend in outer space. Possibly these melancholy matters heightened the dour mood of my new friend, who stayed silent. To me they were nothing, for I hugged myself in a selfish content.

Gold ! It was all gold—real gold of romance ; sunken treasure ; mystery ; legend ; and a most amazing and veridical trick of Fate that had cast back five centuries—no less !

I sought to conjure up that other Robert Matcham from the lost past ; that " lover of a too beautiful

woman," who ran across the sea with his heart's desire in the old wild way. A bold and gallant figure, I was pleased to fancy; an adventuring squire or swaggering free companion in those red, rude times; a traveller by the sword; perhaps a follower of the Black Prince to the Spanish Wars, wherein he might have made such stout allies as the " pilot captain " who served him for his flight.

I pictured him on the deck of his tempest-tossed galley against a strange and savage coast, standing among the hard-lipped sailors, with the woman at his side, facing death as one of that breed would know how to face it; but defiant, clinging to life and to love with grim tenacity, with a tremendous will to survive. He would be hard to kill—such a man—elemental; desperately resentful of the mischance. And I thought I could almost fix the image of him; and he was big-bodied, full-blooded, with arching great chest and tangled hair and fierce Saxon blue eyes.

The *carro* drew up with a sudden jolt; the curtains parted on a dazzling flood of light.

" Would the gentlemen kindly to step down? "

The gentlemen would, both somewhat surprised at having reached the hotel so soon, but rather more surprised the next morning at finding that this was not the hotel at all. . . .

We were in an open, wind-blown street on the water front, where the rain and salt spray drove in our faces and the few lamps showed neither house nor garden. Beside the sea wall lay an automobile; we could hear the churn of its engine, and its headlight split the dark in a sharp wedge and threw a bright zone against the high stone embankment across the road. Midway, and just before us, stood the one who welcomed us so suavely.

It was the roulette banker, he of the spade-cut beard and the superior clothes. He was still superior, in a topper that shone like varnish and a long cape tucked most jauntily over one arm. And he smiled and smiled, like a villain downstage with the spot full upon him.

"Now w'ere," he inquired—"w'ere are that damn doubloon?"

He was effective—the sartorial rogue; and doubtless he knew it. He stroked his beard and thrust his hand to his hip; and behind him on the embankment his huge shadow moved alike, as if some monstrous power there was pulling puppet strings upon him.

"Gentlemen, you been kidnap'," he was good enough to explain. "We are sorry; but it was of a necessitate. If you got away with that gol' piece you are—'ow you say?—leaving us dished up. Therefore"—he waved a ringed hand—"therefore, we arrange' to 'esitate you here, so nize and comfortable."

He would have passed in comic opera anywhere; but the dart of his black eye was keen, his voice crisp and assured. I admired him—with reserve; aware that we were lost in a strange city and that this amiable brigand seemed to know quite well what he was about. Aware more particularly of the forward-drooping shoulder and lowering gaze of Robert Matcham.

I felt rather like a man who travels with a box of dynamite—in no position to kick very hard at any incidental pocket-picking along the road.

"Is this a hold-up or only the request of a loan?" I asked.

"We are many enough to make it whatever we please," he said with a gleam. "I think maybe you bes' call it a public ex'bition of rare and valuable coins."

I thought so too. He was not bluffing. I could

detect the scrape of feet all about us in the dark. It seemed to me the one needful thing was to bring Robert Matcham through in safety. I certainly did not intend that there should be any explosion on my behalf or for the sake of any single doubloon. From which considerations I made haste to submit with the best possible grace.

"Allow me," I said, "to contribute to such a worthy design."

Robert Matcham took a lurching step, but I caught him by the sleeve and forestalled any other answer by tendering my prize.

There was no pose about the banker when he grabbed it, held it to the light and loosed a shrill Portuguese yelp of triumph. The whole street seemed to echo and then fell as suddenly quiet. It was daunting to feel that lonely place alive with unseen watchers. I hoped that now they might let us by; but I had not understood their purpose.

"Sir, I give you kindes' thanks." The banker was bowing, in character again. "Your intelligence are only equal', I 'ope, by that of your frien'. Jus' one more little, so little favour."

He turned to Robert Matcham and held up the doubloon between finger and thumb, so that his eyes blazed over it in the light; and I knew then, with a springing pulse, that the affair had passed quite beyond me and must take its own fateful course.

"You will inform us please w'ere you fin' this."

"Me?" said Robert Matcham with concentrated vehemence. "I'll see you fry in hell!"

The other's suavity fell away from him like a disguise. His teeth showed white in his beard; he gesticulated and the shadow behind him danced with fury.

"In 'ell! In 'ell? Look out! Tha's a place—tha's a place w'ere people speak out of their mouths the way they are told! They make you talk in 'ell, mister, whether you like or not!"

He controlled himself with a strong effort.

"Sir, why you should demand so peevish to be sorry? You got no business with that coin—no; not one damn little affair. What does it make to you? Be nize, now."

Robert Matcham only glowered at him.

"It was by Machico. Yes? Tell me anyways it was near Machico. It must 'ave been. Tell me that."

"No!" said Robert Matcham.

"No?" But once again he clutched his beard. "You want money to tell? Put your price."

"No!" said Robert Matcham; and the word came hot as an oath. . . .

One instant I saw the banker toss his arms like a semaphore: the next we were overborne. Of that I retained chiefly a bewilderment at the force of our captors and the ease with which they dealt with us. Shy with the gun they might be, and indeed it is no natural weapon of their race; but these operators knew the use of trip and hamstring—the hugger-mugger arts; none better. My feet were driven from under me; my wrists paralysed; I was caught and wound like a cocoon; and when I dropped it was on the cushions of the automobile. And, though this might be a slight enough feat regarding myself, it was the measure of their cleverness that I found Robert Matcham already there, packeted in a helpless bale. I believe he had no chance so much as to lift a hand.

"You won' be nize with me?" The banker's chuckle floated back to us. "Then you can try being not nize

with our Number One, and see 'ow you like it!"

He left us that threat to ponder during our journey to Machico. . . . For it was Machico. Where else? As soon as they whisked us away toward the eastern coast road I knew it must be Machico. Where else should they take Robert Matcham, whose five centuries looked down on him this night? The rain had ceased; the clouds were lightening and shredding out to sea when we arrived.

There stands a tiny ruined *fortaleza* on a hill near the south-east point of Madeira, whereof I know more than most folks. You may seek and never find it, for it is now quite lost among the sugar fields, over-topped by the rank cane. Its square tower, whence the first lords of the soil used to keep stern ward against the Moorish marauder, was long ago shorn to the lowly uses of husbandry and built about with arbours; but its walls are a yard thick under the plaster, thick enough for a dungeon—or an inquisition chamber. No place could be more secret, and a man might lie hid there, like a toad in a hollow rock, never to be traced.

This was the obscure prison to which they brought Robert Matcham and myself by tortuous ways along the terraces. And here they carried us in from the forecourt to a low-ceiled hall and set us up for judgment, where many another unhappy captive must have stood before.

It was dim and chill as a vault, relieved only by a hanging iron lamp, which shed one yellow splash of light in the centre. For some time I could discern nothing outside that wavering radiance on the deep-worn flags of the floor, though conscious of shifting figures in the gloom, of whispered stir and preparation.

For myself I had no great fear. The thing was so

remote, and in itself so certain, sure, inexorable ; a play of issues that held no part for a trifler like me. I was only a supernumerary, who had blundered on at the climax ; a spectator who, having bought a stage seat, finds himself hustled into the riot. I had " come asking " ; and it was hard for me to take our picturesque knave and his plottings and struttings quite seriously.

But how of Robert Matcham ? The case was very different with him. When I glanced at his face I knew the possibilities for that harried giant to be just exactly as serious as life and death.

Throughout the long run he had spoken only once ; and of all the comments he might have made !

" It was wrong of me to let you in for this," he had said very quietly ; one of those phrases that throw a lightning glint on a whole nature.

He would yield no more. Circumstance could prod him no further. I swear the fellow was volcanic to the touch. Heaven help the first brigand within reach if ever they loosed him again ! . . .

A door opened behind us and closed again with a heavy jar, and quickly we were aware of a new presence. The waiting hush took an electric quality, a tension. Some one was standing there, across ; and I peered nervously, for this could only be the chief of the band, the " head devil," on whose will or whim we must suppose ourselves to hang. I scarcely know what I expected ; what image I had formed of that mysterious Number One, who had put such strange events in motion. Something very alarming and formidable, at least, and certainly very far detached from the sort of greeting that reached us now. Its words came rippling like notes of music :

" I am sure there must be some meestake. It could

not be these who rafuse a kindness to a stranger! Pedro—theese are zaintlemen! Pedro—Pedro—you shall answer to me! Oh, stupid-head—always to bungle some more!"

I despair of conveying that trick of speech, subtly exotic—like the tang in some rare wine. But the voice! Each has heard such a voice for himself, once or twice perhaps, and felt his blood leap to answer, singing. It was a woman's voice, mellow-throated as a bird's.

Robert Matcham raised his head at the first sound of it; but still we could see nothing to distinguish the speaker—only a vague apparition, nebulous, tall and slim. She moved before us, and presently sank half-reclining on some divan or deep settle midway of the room.

A hurried, anxious mumble seemed to show that the unfortunate Pedro made his excuses; but she waved them away.

"*Messieurs*," she said—"*Senhores*—I must truly apologize to r'ceive you so. My friend' have exceed' their instruction. I would not that they should treat you with such rudeness. I would not have you sink us *criminel*. Believe me—no!"

But, though she protested warmly, I could not observe any offer to release us.

"And English too!" Her soft drawl was a caress. "See how *bête* is that Pedro—to sink he could make you tell anysing to a r-robber in the street! Of course you would not tell! But me—I shall ex-plain so clear and so simple; and then you shall understand. Attend me, please:

"There is a great treasure on the shore of these island. A gr-reat treasure wrecked with a ship long

taime bifore. Always, always it is known—only where? Thad nobody can know! By Machico, they say—yes. But z' waters by Machico are deep and cruel, and thad ship has went all to li'l' piece' hundreds years ago; and only the gold—the heavy, heavy doubloon gold—r'main down there; and to find it is not possible. So at last thad story is nearly forgot! You see? . . .

"But listen now: Only three mon's ago a poor fisher boy finds a one coin on the rocks. Somewhere—somewhere he finds it, and quick the news shoots to Portugal, to Spain. My friends and me, we heard thad news. We are very much excite'; for w'ere thad coin is—you comprehend—there z' rest must also be! So we make a company among us; and me, bicause—oh, bicause I am not quite unknown in several co'ntries and I have some little hinfluence, it may be—I am bicome the Madame Presidente—ze Number One. Yes.

"We hurry to Madeira. And what do you sink? Thad boy—thad poor fisher boy—he don't know w'ere he find that coin! True, I tell you! We take him here; we take him there—no good! He never can rimember w'ere he found it. He is so stupid—a li'l' fool' in the head, that poor João, who now makes drinks in the Casino. *Pobrecito! Pauvre gars!* And so our treasure is lost again. . . .

"Until you come along—you big zaintleman there. You are a stranger, a foreign'—knowing nothing of all this. You take yourself for a walk by the beach and, very first thing—what? You pick up another one coin of this treasure! Ah, thad is so remark-able! Thad is a wonderful, truly! But what can we do? We must know w'ere you pick it up—that is es-sential to us. And nobody knows but you. So now you

understand why my friends should make you all this trouble."

The red dot of a cigarette glowed to life between her lips, and by that tormented spark we glimpsed a face that seemed to advance out of the darkness and to retreat again as swiftly—the merest fleet vision of an exquisite and roseate loveliness.

She waited for an answer ; but Robert Matcham made none.

" Perhaps," she said, with the gentlest concern, " perhaps I do not make myself yet quite clear. You will r'mark thad we are going to know ! Somehow or another we are going to know. Thees is a too ancient claim of ours—writ' on ancient parchmen'—and nobody can kip us from it now, when we are so close. *Voilà !* "

The stillness weighed again and I saw Robert Matcham's great chest heave and fall.

" I, too, have a claim," he said, his full, deep tone rolling under the roof like an organ pipe.

She drew herself up to stare toward him.

" How ? " she breathed.

And it was given Robert Matcham then to have his say out.

" Either that or nothing ! " he declared quite simply. " Either I have a claim or there's no sense to life. Lady—look at me ! Do you see a fool, a weakling or an imbecile ? None of these, I think. . . .

" When a man has been knocked blind and silly by his luck ; when he's been hammered out of all hope and pride in himself—what can he do, lady ? Well, there's one of two things for him : He can lie down and curl up like a worm, and confess he's only a lump of flesh, with no more control over his destiny than a bit of flot-

sam on the sea. He can do that—or else he can sink teeth and claw on the first hold and make it have a meaning; stick to it, and die sticking!

"I've had enough. I call enough! I'm half a world out of my place. I've lost everything I ever wanted; stood every mock and failure—a plaything for events. And now there's got to be a meaning: I'm going to put a meaning to it. If there's a treasure, as you say, it's mine; it must be mine; it's got to be mine—and it's going to be mine or nobody's! . . . And all hell can't make me speak!"

The fellow seemed to swell beside me; I heard the ropes creak about his limbs; and heard, too, the sharp-drawn gasp of the woman in the shadow.

"No! And how do you think you can privent?"

"Well," said Robert Matcham—and his voice rang with high exultation at last—"I can begin this way!"

His bonds snapped from him like thread; his fist went to his breast and came away armed with glitter—João's revolver, which he had hidden there. It spat saffron, twice and thrice, toward the door. He followed on and met a rush of opposing figures. I saw the fat croupier fall. I myself was bowled over, deafened by the bursting clamour, trampled, kicked in the head. Half stunned, I writhed round to watch the struggle, adding my feeble pipe to the din.

"Go on, Robert Matcham!" I yelled. "Go on! Smash through! Oh, smash 'em!"

They swarmed upon him, reaching for their deadly holds. Three had him about the waist; another clung to his feet; still others barred his path. So I saw him for the click of a shutter; and then, roaring with battle, he broke away, stripped them off like rats,

waded on—plucked up the last one bodily and used him like a flail.

He was free! Free long enough to tear the door open and step back for a dash—and there she met him. . . .

A bright bar of light cut in from the outer court and shone full upon her—a splendour of beauty to stop a man's heart in his breast. She was dark, like some tinted pearls—dark as he was fair—and ripe as her own lips. Her eyes, heavy-lidded, were slightly lifted to him with an amorous languidness. She did not flinch, save for a tiny quiver of nostril, thin and clear like a roseleaf, and the rise of her bosom, and when her little hand crept up to her throat.

So she stayed, and so he stayed, while the uproar died and fell away into the void—long and long; while time lost all count; while these two exchanged such a message as five centuries could not change, but no man can guess or words declare. And then—

"Robert," she said, "this is your treasure!"

"Anna!" said Robert Matcham. "Anna!"

I heard them—I, myself; I heard them. . . .

It was the spade-bearded banker who brought me to.

"So," he nodded, with an amazing grin, "you are not a daid? Tha's nize! Now there are not any daids at all, and everybody being much pleased."

I blinked up at him from the divan on which I lay, and then round the room, grey and bare in the dawn, which had stolen in by opened door and casement. The banker sat down at a little table near by and beamed at me. I noticed that he carried one arm in a sling, but otherwise he was still the model rogue, jimp and smiling. There was no one else in sight.

"They are all down 'elping to fish up that box of

gol' pieces," he explained. "You didn' know that, eh?"

"Where?"

"Below the beach. Your frien' showed the place; and, sure enough, there we dived and foun' it. But him—Oh, *là là!*" He chuckled. "Him and her, what do they care? They 'ave gone off together by their lones to see the sunrise—those dears!"

"Who was she?" I cried, starting up dizzily.

"What? You not know that divine *ballerina*, that dancer so sublime, that singer so sweet?" He kissed his finger tips. "Anna Darfetho, of Lisbon, and Paris, and Madrid! Only now—good-bye! It is finish'! She are going with him to Australia. Imagine! And what for, do you think? To spend their share—'Oly Virgin!—in raising little woolly sheeps together!"

"Share?"

"Oh, we all share—that is agree'. Only me—you understand, I am—'ow you say?—the tiger for eat the mos'. Yes, I get the mos', because truly it should belong all mine. . . . Be'old—for this our fazers used to cut the throat!"

He took up from the table one of several blackish, common-looking lumps, like slag, and weighed it; and smiled his smile of the gentlemanly brigand who gloats upon the fortune won. And as I stared at that superior knave the whole stupendous marvel closed up with a final click.

Pilot? Pilot? I remembered the quaint phrase of the chronicle: "Great fighting pilot of Spain"—pilot? Pirate, rather. Pirate, of course! . . .

"Then you must be Pedro Morales?" I gasped.

"Ah, you know my name?" he twinkled pleasantly. "What a coincident!"

But I had had enough—enough of coincidence, of romance and adventure and authentic thrill to last me for some time, and rather more than I had bargained for with my ten pounds. I groped my way out into the open and the brisk morning breeze ; and there, looking down to seaward through an alley in the cane, I saw the new sun come up, as round and broad and ruddy as—as a Portuguese doubloon.

THE PRACTISING OF CHRISTOPHER

SUTTON was startling enough, and brisk, and eager —too eager. For five minutes after he broke in upon us he held us paralysed with the story of his adventure through the back slums of Colootullah and the amazing discovery he had made there. And yet the gross fact glanced from us altogether, perhaps through his very vehemence, perhaps because of a certain obscure unsteadiness in the fellow. . . .

"That's where the chief went to hide himself!" he cried, and we heard the words, but rather we were listening to the tone and watching Sutton; he convinced us of nothing.

He stood before us alight with animation; still breathed with hurry. Though the gummy heat of the monsoon made the little cabin a sweat box, he had not stopped to strip his rubber coat. It shone wet and streaky under the lamp as he gestured, and the raindrops glistening in his stub moustache were no brighter than his eyes. And this was a notable thing of itself —to see him so restored, the jaunty, confident young mate we had used to know, drawn from the sulky reserve that had held him these many weeks. But most singular of all, as it seemed to us then, was the way he wound up his outburst:

". . . So I came straight away on the jump to get you both," he declared, in a rush. "We can straighten

out this mess to-night—the three of us—just as easy. I've a great notion. . . . Listen, now.

"There was a chap in a book I read, d'y' see? The other Johnnies put a game on him. Didn't they put up a game on him, to be sure! They made him think he was a duke or something, d'y' see? When he woke up! And, by gum, he believed 'em! They made him. Now there's the very tip we need to bring Chris Wickwire around all serene."

Captain Raff, sitting rigid on the couch, recovered sufficiently to unclamp his jaw from the fag-end of a dead cheroot. He had the air of one who goes about to pluck a single straw of sense from a whirl of fantasy.

"A book," he repeated. "A chap in a book? What in Hull t' Halifax is the boy talkin' about?"

Literature aboard the *Moung Poh* was represented between the chronometer and the bottle rack by a scant half-dozen of seafaring publications. But Sutton laid no strain on our library. From his own pocket, like a conjurer that draws a rabbit from a hat and quite as astonishingly, he produced a shabby, black-bound octavo. "Here it is, sir. Shakespeare wrote it. And the chap's name was Christopher too—a tinker by his trade. Queer thing!"

It was: you must figure here just how queer it was, and how far removed we were in our lawful occasions from books and people in books and all such recondite subjects—captain, mate, and acting engineer of a 1,500-ton tub of a country wallah trading between Calcutta, Burma, the Straits, and the China side.

By common gossip up and down among the brass-buttoned tribe such billets mostly got to men with a

spot in them somewhere. We kept our spots pretty well hidden if it was so. There was nothing publicly wrong with any of us. Captain Raff commanded for our Parsee owners, because he always had commanded for them and never expected to do anything else, soberly and carefully—a man of simple vision, incapable of vain hopes and imaginings. Myself, I was following up a long run of ill health, glad enough of the sure berth and good food. And the only obvious fault with Sutton—though the same can be serious too—was youth. . . .

Here we were, then, on the old *Moung Poh*. From the chart-room port we could see the low-lying haze of lights beyond Principe Ghat and hear the lash of rain down the Hooghly and smell the sickly mixture of twenty-four different smells that make the breath of that city built on a sink. We had been coaling and hard at it all day in a grime that turned to paste upon us. What with heat and weariness, our minds were pasted as well, you might say. The captain and I were grubbing among indents over a matter of annas and pice, when along comes Sutton, back from shore leave, to spring a wondrous tale—ending in Shakespeare! If I remind you further that there is more truth than poetry about the mercantile marine, perhaps you may glimpse the net effect.

Sutton doubled the volume hastily between his hands and ruffled its worn pages. He seemed quite familiar with it. How it had ever reached the *Moung Poh* we could not guess, nor did he give us time to inquire. "I'll show you, sir," he continued in the same nervous key. "These Johnnies, you should know, they found this old bargee dead drunk. And so they made out to gammon him for his own good, to practise on him, as

they put it. 'Sirs,' says one of 'em 'sirs, I will practise on this drunken man.' Here's the place ready marked, d'y' see?"

Sirs, I will practise on this drunken man.
What think you, if he were convey'd to bed,
Wrapp'd in sweet clothes, rings put upon his fingers,
A most delicious banquet by his bed,
And brave attendants near him when he wakes:
Would not the beggar then forget himself?

"That was their little game—to make the beggar forget himself. And they did—by jing, they played him proper! He *did* forget himself, all his low habits and such." He hammered the book for emphasis. "Soon as I saw Wickwire it come to me like that. There's the thing we'd ought to do for him!"

"'Rings on his fingers——?'" The captain turned a dumb appeal toward me.

"Mr. Sutton says he's found the chief, sir," I suggested, for I had begun to understand, a little. "He's found Chris Wickwire."

"Wickwire?" With a jerk he caught up the real marvel at last, and the crop hair seemed to stiffen all over his bullet head. "The chief!" he roared.

"That's what I've been trying to tell you, sir."

"Alive?"

"Very much alive."

"Well, where is he? Why ain't he here?"

We saw the glow fade from Sutton's cheek. "I thought I explained, sir. He—he's not quite himself." Already the index of his temperament was beginning to swing from fair to foul again and his handsome face to blur with doubt. The thing that had looked so easy at the first feverish flush of relief was taking

another proportion. "No, that's the devil of it," he said, gnawing the corner of his moustache. "Not by any means himself. He didn't even seem to know me."

"He might anyhow ha' wrote to tell us what happened to him that night."

The mate's dark lashes lifted a little in a superior way they had as he stuffed the book out of sight.

"He might have, only Wickwire couldn't read—you remember, sir. He'd hardly be apt to write either."

But Raff held to the point.

"Are you sure it was him? What'd he have to say?"

"He wouldn't come along—wouldn't listen to me. He—he said, if you want to know—he told me to go troubling the wicked if I liked, but to leave the weary at rest, and swore a little by this and that and so turned to another pipe."

The captain smote his thigh a clap like a pistol-shot, and indeed it needed no more to convince any one, the quaint phrase brought quick before us the figure of that sour, dour Scotch engineer whose loss had cast such a gloom upon our little company, had left such a lading of mystery aboard the *Moung Poh*.

"Six—seven weeks since. And he ain't dead after all——!"

"Seven weeks and three days." . . .

There was that in Sutton's tone which served to check the captain's jubilant bellow. He knew, we both knew, what would be coming next. "Twentieth June was the date, sir—before our last trip to Moulmein. We were lying here in this very berth, No. 6 Principe Ghat, on just such another night as this, at the beginning of the rains. We'd been coaling too;

some empty barges lay alongside. As it might be now, without the gap of time——"

Sutton spoke downward-looking, twisting his cap in his hands, and he told the thing like one doing penance and square enough, as he had from the first alarm. A clean-cut, upstanding youngster, a satisfactory figure of a youngster, the sort every man likes to frame to himself for an image of his own youth. And yet—and yet, hearkening, I caught the same unsteady note that had made me curious of him often and often before. Something in him rang false. Not so much like a bell that has cracked, if you understand me, but rather like metal whereof the alloy was never rightly fined.

"I was off watch that evening," he went on. "Chris Wickwire wanted to go ashore—for the first time in a year maybe. You know you generally couldn't lift him out of the ship with a winch, and so I waited till he should come up and step by the gangway to fix a bit of a joke on him. It was wrong of me, and very silly, you know, and dearly I've paid for it. But I only meant a jape, sir—to hear him rip and fuss and perhaps jolt a proper oath out of him and make him break that everlasting clay cutty he always wore in his face. . . . I fixed to loose the hand rope on the outboard side——

"I did loose it, *you* know I did; and then I leaned there on the rail to laugh. He went down the steps in the dark. I figgered he'd be slid quite neat into the shore boat waiting below, d'y' see? I heard him stumble and call for me before I thought what I'd done. I heard him, and I didn't go to help, but I never thought how it would be, sir, not till too late. You believe that——"

The cry wrenched from him as he searched our

faces. It was very necessary to him that we should believe; he had all a boy's eagerness to keep the illusion—some illusion. And this was natural too, though even the kid prank as he told it came to the same stark and gratuitous horror. For Chris Wickwire had dropped out of life from that gangway!

Captain Raff chewed his cheroot for a space in silence. You would hardly expect him to have the subtlety of a donkey engine, so to speak, but he might surprise you at times, and he had learned to be very patient with the maté. Perhaps in his own time he had passed some crisis when the stuff in him was moulding and setting, though it must have been quite a different occasion with so rugged a soul.

"Well," he said carefully, "we know all that, and I never heard nobody jaw you as hard about it as what you done yourself. But it's all right now, ain't it? You've found him. Didn't you just say you found him again?" And then he added what turned out to be a singular comment: "If the chief was smokin' his ol' pipe as usual, I judge nothin' much could ha' happened to him. He must be pretty much his own self after all."

So Sutton was driven back on the mere fact, which must always have been tough for him. He had blinked it thus far, as I suppose was his weakness to blink and to spin all manner of sanguine threads about the naked nubs of things. But if he meant to tell, he had here to tell outright, though I saw him wince. . . .

"I found him in an awful hole down there," he faltered, "a kind of a chandoo shop. And the stuff he's smoking now is—opium!"

I cannot say that either Raff or myself had arrived

at any clearness when we headed away into the maze of Colootullah that night. It was all a bad dream, and it began badly, in a dog kennel of a ticca gharri that racked us in tune to our own jarring thoughts.

We huddled together on the one bench, we two, though, dear knows, the captain would have been a fare by himself. Sutton sat opposite quite stiffly with his knees drawn aside, and the journey long said never a word. And this was the next aspect we had of him, you will note : a strained and silent presence and a pallid face glimpsed now and then by the brief flicker of some street lamp. For he had seen what we had not —Chris Wickwire alive, but Chris Wickwire transmogrified out of all belief, the inmate of a hideous den in the city's vilest slum—and somehow it set him sharp apart from us. . . .

You must know there had been something very special in the bearing of all hands toward the chief engineer of the *Moung Poh*. Every ship has her social code. We had been a good deal of a family craft, as they say, and in the curious way of such traditions this had come to centre on Chris Wickwire. If Raff was the sturdy patriarch, the chief had been the prim and formidable maiden aunt of our little household on the high seas.

I suppose to any outsider he must have seemed no more than a long-boned, long-lipped stick of a Dumbartonshire Cameronian, as dry as the texts he was always mishandling. But he had a value to us like a prized domestic relic ; we admired, decided, and swore equally by and after him. His vast, lean height and face of a hanging judge, his denatured profanity, and the intimate atmosphere of disaster, hell-fire, and

general damnation in which he moved—these were points of pride and almost of affection.

"See that eye?" said a Newcastle collier cove newly translated third engineer—we sampled some odd specimens for third up and down the ports—"Ol' Chris, 'twas 'im done it. 'You red, raw, an' blistered son of perdition,' he says, 'I'll learn you to 'ide liquor in your bunk. Wine is a knocker,' he says, and stretches me. And with that goes back to his cabin to *prye* for me! I 'eard 'im groanin' as I come by the deadlight. Oh, he's a 'oly wonder and no mystyke—once he goes to set a bloke right there's nothin' he won't do for 'im!"

Nobody knew what wide courses had brought him eastward; his history began at the dock head where he appeared with the famous clay pipe in his mouth and the rest of his luggage in a plaid. There was a loose rumour he had once been top tinker in the big liners, until he took to raiding the saloon for revivals and frightening the lady passengers into fits. It was said again that he had come out from his native boiler shops of Clyde as a missionary, making vast trouble for the official brethren and seeking converts with a club. But if his doctrine was somewhat crude, he had a lifetime's knowledge of machinery, and the man that can nurse engines will need to show fewer diplomas in outlandish parts than the one that can save souls. By the same token Chris Wickwire undertook to do both.

You can figure how this bleak moralist would fasten on a type like Sutton. Soft airs and sweet skies had no appeal for the Cameronian; to him the balmy East was all one net of the devil baited with strange seductions, and unnameable allurements. The rest of us

were hardly worth a serious warning. But our youthful mate, with the milk scarcely dry on his lips, as you might say, and his fresh appetite for life and confident humour—here was a brand to be snatched from the burning: here was a stray lamb for an anxious shepherd!

And Sutton—at the first he took to it like a treat. It made a new game for him, you see, amusing and rather flattering as well, the kind of a jape he was all too apt at.

"Where ha' ye been the day—ashore again? Buyin' gauds an' silk pajamies, I notice. Laddie, do ye never tak thocht for your immortal speerit, which cannot hide under lasceevious trickeries nor yet cover its waeful nakedness? No' to speak of yon blazin' Oriental bazaars, fu' o' damnable pitfalls for the unwary! Aye, laugh now! . . Laddie, ye're light-minded. Heaven send down its truth upon ye before ye wuther like the lilies o' the field!"

This sort of thing was good fun for Sutton—at the start, as I say. He must have had many a rare chuckle from superior ground. Being damned with such assurance, he naturally inquired into means of grace, and so developed the jest.

With the streak of shyness that marked him, he kept it pretty much between himself and the censor, but I chanced to overhear an odd passage. He called one day for a Bible, offering to prove the other wrong on some argued matter.

"Na, fegs," said Christopher. "I hae nane."

"What—no Book!"

"I need nane. What for?"

"Why, for me, of course. It's a remedy for all

ills, they say. . . . I'm surprised at your not trying it on."

They made a picture there by the rail in a strong glint of sunlight—the chief, squatted on a bollard like a grim and battered Moses giving the law; Sutton, dapper in fresh ducks, his hands in his pockets, swaying easily to the ship's motion.

Wickwire seemed to reflect. "Aye, it's a grand book, nae doot, but wad ye listen? I been watchin' ye, laddie—I ken ye better than maybe ye think."

"Much obliged, I'm sure," said Sutton pertly.

"Aye, there it is, ye see. Ye never tak' the straight way wi' life. But what I dinna just ken is this: are ye a'thegither past the reach o' good words for remedy? Puttin' aside the false glitter, could ever ye cast the beam from yer eye an' listen how hell gapes for ye?"

"I might," said Sutton. "You haven't a notion how I enjoy hearing about it. You might read me."

I was startled then to see the depth of yearning in Wickwire's regard, to see his hands knotting and twisting one in the other. However it might be with the mate, it was no play with him; he was wrung with pity as toward an erring son, or toward some younger memory of himself, perhaps—for Sutton had this appeal.

"Suppose I should tell ye now I canna read the heid o' one printed word frae the hurdies o' it?"

The idea took slow hold of Sutton while he stared and brightened.

"Can't read?" he echoed. "You can't read? Why, in that case—I could read to you," he cried—"couldn't I? By gum, there's a notion! I'll do a bit of instructing myself, d'y' see? . . . Truth—oodles of truth! I'll show you, old boy——"

And he did. At our very next port he went prowling among the shops where the Government students get their second-hand textbooks, and when he came back he brought the book with him, a book with a gilt cross on the cover. You would have fancied the chief must have gained a great point for salvation; on the other hand, Sutton apparently skimmed the cream of the joke, for he certainly read. Thereafter one heard them in a quiet hour, a harsh voice like the rasp of an ash hoist rising now and then to protest and a lighter response, droning a line or perhaps breaking over into merriment. . . .

"Where's the chief?"

"Prayer meetin' on the after 'atch."

"Saved anybody yet?"

"Give 'im 'is chawnce," said the third. "Give 'im 'is bleedin' chawnce. He'll fetch that myte to glory if 'e 'as to spatchcock 'im!"

But it ended as, of course, it was bound to. The one grew weary or the other too insistent; their sittings were suspended. For a time they were not even on speaking terms, and the very day we were coaling at Calcutta—seven weeks before, you remember—they broke suddenly on an open quarrel. What it was about none could say, but all that afternoon the mate went strutting with a very pink face, while Christopher kept bobbing up the scuttle to glower after him with a long-drawn lip over his pipe.

"Did he say he's gaun ashore the nicht?" he asked me once, in a whisper. "Aye, there it is, ye see," he added to himself. "Wae's me for the fool in his heart! He's young—he's ower young. What he needs is to come to gripples with raw, immortal truth for one moment. What he needs is a rod an' a staff to com-

fort him—an' by this an' that," he breathed through the pipe-stem, "I'd like to have the layin' on o' it!"

The same night we lost Wickwire. . . .

Perhaps you can see now how hard it came for us to believe, as we hastened on his rescue toward Colootullah, that this kind of a man, that this particular man, had fallen the victim to a loathsome vice.

By what we could piece out from Sutton's report, at the time of the accident, Wickwire had never dropped into the river at all. He must have landed in one of the empty coal barges alongside—there had been one missing next morning which later was picked up near the Howrah Bridge—and so reached shore.

"He got hisself shook in his wits," said the captain, breaking a silence. "Is that how you make it?"

"Something of the kind," I agreed, and recalled a lad from Milford Haven I once was shipmates with who took a clip over the head from a falling block and for a month afterwards was dumb, though otherwise hale enough.

"It'd be an almighty clip over the head would strike the chief dumb," said Raff simply—"or anything like it."

Sutton said nothing.

Meanwhile we went plunging on through rain-swept darkness. I never knew the course nor the place where we left our gharri and took to narrower ways afoot, but here the nightmare closed in upon us. We breathed an air heavy with mortality, on pavements made slimy by countless naked feet, in a shaft, in a pit, between dank walls. Shapes drifted by like sheeted corpses, peering, floating up, melting away; from pools and eddies of lamplight sinister faces started out and

fingers pointed after us. For we had come to strange waters, the teeming backwaters of the city.

Port Said has its tide rips if you like, is wickeder perhaps in its hectic way; you need to keep to soundings in Singapore, and parts of Macao and Shanghai you do well to navigate with an extra look out and pressing business somewhere else. But Calcutta at night is the Sargasso Sea. There you wander among the other derelicts, helpless, hopeless, moving always deeper down lost channels, uncharted, fetid, clogged with infinite suggestions of dim horrors——

To top our bewilderment, the captain and I found ourselves being piloted swiftly through this welter, without pause or fault, by alleys and reeking courts, doubling and twisting. We dived into a lurid, crowded cavern that echoed with some dismal merrymaking of string and drum. We jostled the loungers in a low-caste drinking shop and pushed on to a dark stair that rose like the ladder of a dovecote. The place was alive with twitterings and shufflings. Steps fled before us and half-naked bodies caromed against us from the void until a last rush landed us on the floor above the street.

There was a dusky room hung with blue stuffs where dragons black and gold crawled and ramped. It ran along the front of the house as a gallery, but it had no windows—only a row of shallow cells, so to say, divided by the hangings. Down at the far end low lights burned hot and small under wreaths of greasy incense, and a big, green joss grinned from a niche. He was fat and crass and ugly, that joss, a fit deity for such a den, and he seemed to nod and to listen!

Perhaps because we were listening! . . .

"Whaur's that pipe? Whaur's that pipe? Boy, you smoke wallah, whaur's that pipe?" A voice to send the chill into your marrow, slab and dreary and overlaid, but with a rasp that we knew and would have known anywhere on earth, or under. "*Not* the silver one, ye blistered limb——"

Nobody came; nothing stirred among the curtains. Sutton had closed the door, to lean there. It was very still. Except for the leering joss and the monstrous embroidered things on the walls the rooms showed empty. And the plaint began again, monotonous, muffled:

"Whaur's that pipe o' mine?" . . .

Raff was first to break the spell that held us. With a brusque gesture he set us in motion, and we followed on from curtain to curtain down the gallery, and at the end near the joss we found him we sought. He lay propped on a charpoy in a nest of squab blue cushions. On a stand beside him glowed a tiny lamp, and a yellow Eurasian lad was tending him as perhaps the imps tend the damned. Evidently the pipe had been found; he held the length of polished bamboo ready for the fuming pellet, and he raised himself on an elbow as we three drew silently near and stood by. "Chief!" said the captain, and stopped dead.

He looked up at us then, and it was Chris Wickwire, his very self. He looked and looked and made no sign.

I think I might have been less shocked to see some change, some altered trait to veil the normal image of him. But there was none. He was the same, the same weather-beaten old tinker with the lean, long face and hard-set jaw and the dour eye that could quell a mutinous stokehole at a glance. In the midst of this evil and fantastic luxury he still wore the same old shiny

alpaca too, his regular shore-going and Sunday garb and a ragged bit of ribbon at his throat. Somehow that cut me all up.

"Wickwire!" began Raff again. "Come away out of that. What are y' doin' here?"

No answer; the smoker's concern was for his pipe.

"Chief, d'you hear me? You're needed on board."

The captain shook him gently, and then not so gently.

"Drop it. We've come to bring you away. For any sakes quit that devilment, now, will y'!" . . .

The figure on the couch made a languid effort.

"I'll grant ye—I'll grant ye the siller's weel enough for a change. Aye, it makes a change." He wagged his head at us confidentially. "But the bamboo's the best. It smokes sweet—varra sweet it smokes. An' that unhandy thief of a boy——" He paused to draw lazily at the mouthpiece and loosed a slow gout of vapour. "He's always mislayin' it somewhere——"

Raff cried a round oath and snatched the pipe from him; flung it down. But the chief only sank back among the pillows and closed his eyes, even smiling a little, quite content, as one accustomed to the vagaries of phantom guests. . . .

For the last few moments we had forgotten our appointed guide and leader. He had been standing by, a stricken witness, but with a common impulse the captain and I turned on him, and he started from contemplation of his handiwork as if he had pulled a secret wire.

"You brought us here," roared Raff, accusing.

"I—I didn't think he was as bad as this."

"Bad! He's crazy as a coot. What were you going to do about it?"

The flurry of our passage had begun to draw in be-

hind us in a back-lash wave. The house seemed to hum under our feet. A door opened on a gust of muttering voices. Down by the entrance to the gallery a knot of vague shadows had gathered. It occurred to me, and time enough you might suppose, that we were very far from possible aid in a region where visitors are a poor risk. And suddenly, out of space for all I knew, appeared a little noiseless silken apparition of a Chinese who regarded us from twin lenses with a phosphorescent gleam.

It was of a piece with the whole mysterious side of the affair that he should address Sutton a screed in the vernacular and that the mate should answer. I was long past wonder—anything might happen now—and I only noted that our companion could be wheedling and plausible in more than one language. But Raff seemed curiously put out and broke upon their chatter.

"Friend of yours?" he rumbled.

Sutton spun around nervously.

"He—he says we've got to go away quick. He says we've no business here."

"Tell him sure thing, soon as we get our friend."

"But he says—he says Chris is his lodger, in a private house, and mustn't be disturbed."

"Oh, he does, hey? Well, we'll give him a chance to explain to the police in another minute."

"That's no good either."

"Does he figger we can't get no police?"

"'Tisn't that, sir. The police couldn't help."

"Why not?"

"Why, it seems he's breaking no law. There's no bar to private smoking. I've been trying to get around him somehow, but there doesn't seem to be any-

thing we can do. He says the white man has a right to stay here, and he has a right to keep him." . . .

"Keep him! Well, by God!"

"I suppose Chris must have a little money banked somewhere," continued the mate miserably. "Li Chwan'll never let go of him while it lasts."

"And you mean we got to leave him after all—leave the ol' chief to rot where he lays?"

"Unless he wants to—to come away of his own motion," stammered Sutton. "I thought he'd come quite easy when he saw the three of us. But he won't. He doesn't want to—and that's the dreadful fact. And—and—only look at him now!"

His fascinated gaze had coasted back to the face on the cushions. It might have been cut from tan marble, impassive and stern, and we saw what he meant—though perhaps not as vividly as he saw—the wretched, incongruous tragedy of such a face in such a setting.

"So this is the end of your grand scheme!" said Captain Raff bitterly.

Well, you see, it came rather rough on a superior young optimist. For the very first time in his life, I suppose, Sutton found himself called to account without a chance either to smile or to sulk, to palter or to play at clever tricks. Whatever his share in the unhappy business had been—and we had never fully fathomed it, you remember—he was facing the result of that folly without the possibility of disguise or excuse or easy escape. Here was actual, physical hell, to equal Wickwire's own preaching—the murky depth of it. And here was Wickwire himself, condemned to the dreariest fate ever devised by unamusing devils. And who to blame? . . .

What he suffered we had a guess even then. Being the sort of chap he was, he fought a very pretty little fight with himself in that moment—which we might have guessed as well. His face was gridironed, studded with sweat, and his hands clenched and opened. He turned here and there, seeking the careless word or the flippant gesture, some relief to an intolerable sense of guilt. But writhe as he liked, his darting glances always painfully returned to the still victim on the charpoy.

The Chinese touched his arm. . . .

"No," he quavered. "No—no, by gum, *no*! It's not the end. Keep off of me!" Like a man who clears himself of a vileness, he slung Li Chwan across the room. "And you," he cried to us, "hoist the chief up out of that, and lively. There's a way yet if we take the straight of it. Grab him!"

We responded—just as we had hesitated before—to some subtle quality behind the words, and while we were gathering the limp body Sutton himself was laying wide hold on the draperies across the wall. They ripped and swayed, swirled down about him so that he stood waist deep wrestling with figurative monsters until the whole blue screen tore away and revealed the glass partition which closed the end of the gallery. Solid at the base, it was latticed above with small panes, and, taking the straight way with a vengeance, he flung himself literally and bodily against it. The jingling crash brought a howl from the stairhead, but he broke a gap with his bleeding fists, wrenched out the crosspieces. . . . A spatter of warm rain blew in upon us.

"There's only the street below!" I gasped.

"Out!" was Sutton's crisp order. "Out—and through—and over with you!"

We had no choice; his furious energy drove us. Wickwire hung a dead weight in our arms, but we propped him on the jagged sill and scrambled after, any fashion. Clinging there, we had one last glimpse into the gallery behind us, set like a stage for our benefit.

We saw the little Chinese come on with uplifted knife, spitting and glaring like a wildcat, saw the knobbed, bare shoulders and coppery, brute faces of his crew, saw Sutton turning back. He had no weapon, but he armed himself. He dragged the big green joss from its niche, lamps, incense, and all, twirled it over his head, exultant, transformed with berserk fury, shouting some free battle-cry of his own—and met them. Thereafter the place went dark in a babble of shrieks, and we dropped like slugs from a garden wall.

So we brought Chris Wickwire home again—what was left of him. . . .

There was small joy in that homecoming, you can figure. Dawn broke weeping as we were hurrying aboard with our unconscious burden. The reaches of the river were beginning to show slaty downstream, and a little damp wind running with the day was like a chill after fever, unfriendly and comfortless. The lamp in the chief engineer's cabin had paled from saffron to citrine in the morning light when the officers of the *Moung Poh* took stock of themselves once more, and of each other and an ill prospect.

Wickwire had neither spoken nor stirred, though his breathing was regular and he seemed to have taken no immediate hurt from his fall except the reopening of an old, ragged wound above the ear. Captain Raff had done the bandaging: he stood back from the last neat pleat.

"A clip over the head, as you say," he observed, addressing me pointedly while he wiped his clumsy great hands that yet had wrought as tenderly as a woman's. "And pretty lucky at that. He'll do well enough now till we get a doctor. You better dig out after one yourself—try the Port Office; they'll have to be notified anyway, I judge, when he wakes."

We looked at the shell of a man on the bunk. "It's got to be the—the hospital, then?" I asked.

"I believe that's what they call it," said Raff gruffly.

"Beg pardon, sir," put in Sutton very quietly, "but we'll notify no office and no doctor either—not till we sheer have to." . . .

The mate was planted by the door, where he had been waiting in silence while we two ministered to the chief. Raff had ignored him since our return, but he eyed him now sternly up and down. Most people would have eyed him so, for he made rather an appalling figure, streaked and stained, with his wounds half dried upon him, a raking cut along one cheek and his coat hanging in shreds.

"What in Hull t' Halifax are you talkin' about?"

Sutton drew from his pocket a certain familiar object, a small, black-bound volume. "There was a chap in a book I read, sir——"

The captain regarded him, purpling.

"Is this more of your wonderful notions?"

"It's my plan to save Chris Wickwire," returned the mate firmly, "and I'm bound to try it on. Just as it says here. 'Sirs,' it says, 'sirs, I will practise on this drunken man——'"

He held out the shabby octavo and, considering it again with heightened amazement, of a sudden I knew where I had seen it before.

" Why," I cried, " that's the book you got for the chief. I can tell from the gilt cross on the cover. That's Wickwire's Bible ! "

" It is the book I got for the chief," he said slowly, making plain the case against himself, " and it has a cross on the cover. But it's no Bible. Only an old collection of plays I bought to gammon him with. Shakespeare wrote it.

" There was no cover to it either, so I bought an old cover off a hymn book and pasted it over. You can see for yourselves—the cross is upside down." And, in fact, that we might miss nothing he showed us the cover, wrong way with the pages. " I remember the chief, taking lessons from me but having only the cross to go by, d'y' see—the chief used always to hold the book wrong side up. I remember," he added with an odd smile, quite mirthless—" I remember how I laughed. I used to think it funny."

Some way that made the captain froth. Since our invasion of Colootullah he had been increasingly rigid toward the mate, and here he broke out.

" So we've had nothin' but your dam' lyin' tricks from the start ! All the time you was readin' to him——"

" Only gammon, sir. I used to experiment on him with choice bits—calling 'em truth and Scripture."

" And now you're after more fool games of the same kind ! Can't you look what's come of 'em ? Look there ! " He pointed to the stark figure.

" I see what's come, sir," said Sutton, and though he was white under his stains he never flinched. " And Wickwire, he saw what *would* come. He was trying to stop me the night I dropped him into the river—when we quarrelled. Because, d'y' see, from fooling with

the works of life just to learn how they're made I'd begun fooling with the works of hell. And he had found me out."

"Ah!" said Raff, with one of his rare flashes. "*That* was how you knew the road to Li Chwan's!"

"To Li Chwan's—and—other places. I've been hitting it pretty regular for six months or so. The chief tried to save me, but I wouldn't hearken, and there, as you say—there's the result. It's just as if he'd done it all as a sacrifice, to show me. It's just as if—as if he'd paid for mine with the price of his own immortal soul!" . . .

We stared at him, a tattered ruin but an upstanding youngster, and we could sense no flaw in him now. He had come to grips with raw truth for once without failing—not without a falter, you understand, for he had to put aside a boy's pride and a last illusion in himself—but clear-eyed, the straight way, as every man likes to think he might have done in his own youth.

"Well," said Raff at last. "What's your notion?"

Sutton drew a deep breath.

"You know, sir, the chief never took any note of time. One day or another—one month or another, it was all alike to him. Well, here it is: Why can't we strike out these seven weeks and three days from his memory—as if they never had been? We're fixed just as we were when we lost him. He's in his own bed, the ship's in the same berth, just coaled; same weather, same crew, same folk about him—same everything. He wakes up—wouldn't he think the whole mess had been a dream? . . . Wouldn't he? Couldn't we make him, just as they did with the Johnny here?" He hammered the book for emphasis. "'*Would not the beggar then forget himself?*'"

We winked as it burst upon us. Here was one beggar who had forgotten himself, anyway; his vanity, his posing, his weakness in the fervour of a real idea.

"Perhaps there's something in make-believe after all—some merit. Perhaps it's got some truth in it too. It mightn't work, but I feel it must and will. I got the tip from the very book I gammoned him with, from the very passage he must have marked himself at random—d'y' see? And if he should come right——"

"Whist!" breathed the captain. "He's stirrin' now!"

The lank form on the bunk had moved. The bandaged head turned, and Chris Wickwire looked up from his pillow. His gaze travelled slowly over the bare, familiar details of the cabin, the racks and lockers, the deck beams above, the panels on the bulkhead, his own spare garments on their hooks—passed over our huddled group by the door and rested at the open port, its brass rim shining with the new daylight. He lay so for a time, tossed a little restlessly, and seemed to seek something. And then:

"Whaur's that pipe?" he muttered.

Our hearts stood still. . . .

"Whaur's that blisterin' pipe?" he demanded, and raised himself with an effort, groped along the shelf beside him, found what he wanted by the tobacco-jar, and proceeded leisurely to ram and to charge—his old clay cutty!

Raff had dragged Sutton and his tatters into the thwart-ship passage, out of sight, but I was clinging in the doorway when the dour old eye nailed me.

"Feeling better, chief?" I managed somehow to gulp. "You got quite a bump last night. Your head'll be sore for a bit—and—and the captain will

want to know right away if the bandage is comfortable."

He considered me a space.

"Whaur's the mate?" he asked, and added quickly: "Did he go ashore?"

"No, sir. He stayed to tend you. He says he's lost his taste for shore leave, anyhow." I gasped, for Sutton's hand had caught mine in the passage, and it nearly crushed my fingers. "He says—he says he'll wait till you can go with him if you like."

Wickwire paused as he was lighting his pipe.

"Does he say that?" he queried, in a tone you would never have thought possible on those grim lips. "Fetch him here to me, will ye now?"

I stumbled away blindly. When I returned some minutes later he was propped quite comfortably at the end of the bunk.

"Beg pardon, chief——" I began.

"Hey?"

"Mr. Sutton can't come just now. I—I didn't care to disturb him——"

"How's that?"

"Well, it seems—the fact is—I—I left him in his cabin on his knees, and it looked—anyway it seemed to me as if he might, perhaps, be—praying!"

For the first time in my knowledge of him, his normal self, the chief smiled, and it was like the struggling ray of early sun that pierces the grey dawn. I should have left him then with that last glint of a picture to close the affair, and with Sutton's last word of it in my mind. "He's forgotten!" he had cried to me, in a clear bell note. "We did make him forget!"

I say I should have gone away with that image and that word. But just at the instant I saw a curious

thing—and heard another. From the spot where Sutton had dropped it, Chris Wickwire had retrieved the book. He opened the volume on his knee and turned it around and over with a gesture entirely casual.

"Aye," he said, as he settled himself contentedly on his pillow. "Aye—well, I'll just sit here with this for a while. It's a grand book, beyond the pen o' men an' angels; I often wunner how I got along without one. Ye've no notion what comfort I've found just to sit an' haud in my twa hands such a staff o' immortal truth!" . . .

Had he forgotten? Had he anything or any need to forget? I could not tell: but this I know and this I saw while he twinkled at me through a puff of smoke before I fled from the doorway, that the book on his knee as he turned it and rippled its worn pages—the book, I say, was *right side up*!

AMOK

MERRY saw how the thing was done one steamy hot day at Palembang, and he saw it quite stark and plain. He had a first balcony seat to the performance, as you might say, for he was leaning from a raised and shaded veranda on the river street when it happened just below him. Also, by some chance or other, he was almost completely sober at the time. And this is the thing the sobered Merry saw:

From a doorway just across sprang suddenly out and down to the muddy level a little stout-shouldered, half-naked Malay with a face mottled and bluish, with foam on his lip and a creese in his hand. Forthright he drove into the crowd like a reaper into standing grain. His blade rose and fell in a crimson flicker, and he strode over the bodies of two victims before the people were aware of him and fled streaming through alleys and bolt-holes. Then the terrible hoarse cry of the man hunt began to muster, and furious swart figures to start back out of the mass and to line the course with bright points of steel. The murderer neither paused nor turned aside, but held straight on, hewing steadily and silently, until the weapons bristled thick about him and he went down at last like a malignant slug under a tumble of stinging wasps.

Merry resumed breathing with a conscious effort and loosed his clutch of the balcony rail. . . .

"What—was that ?" he wanted to know.

A stolid and rather shabby client of the Dutch marine persuasion drew stolidly on a cheroot and craned over to count the huddled bundles that marked the madman's path.

"Oh, it iss nothing," observed this judicious person, who might have been mate, or such, of a country ship. "He got four only. Sometimes they kill eight—twelve—even more, till they get themselves killed. That fellow was just a common fellow."

"But why—what was he after ?"

"Oh, it iss just going amok, you know. That iss a habit wit' the Malay folk. I have seen them often."

Still Mr. Merry desired light.

"How can I say ?" returned the other. "A native iss always a native, except when he iss only a man an' a dam' fool. Perhaps his woman has gone bad on him or he has played his last copper doit at gambling. Maybe he has crazied himself wit' opium or bhang. Maybe he iss just come to a finish, you know ?"

"A finish ?" stammered Merry.

"Where he has no more use: where he get sorry wit' the world an' wants to die quick. So he takes his knife an' runs amok to stab so many people as he can, an' he don't care a dam' if only he makes a big smash. It iss like a sport, truly."

"Yes," said Merry. "Very like a sport."

Thereupon he gave pious thanks that he owned no share in the fantastic human chemistry that could produce such results. It was the sharpest reminder of essential racial differences. It made him feel sick and

shaky, and since he knew only the simple cure for ills of body as of mind, he applied himself so earnestly that within half an hour he felt nothing at all, and the proprietor of the verandaed house on the river street had him thrown into a barge, where he slept with the flies crawling over his beard.

Afterwards he recovered sufficiently to get himself out of Palembang, and after that out of Muntok and Batavia and Banjermassin and other places where he had no ostensible business to be. On his road he continued to encounter divers strange sights and incidents peculiar to the latitude and the social layers through which he moved; but the affair was a warning to him. He had been shocked. He had been very deeply shocked and he was always careful never to let himself get quite so sober again—a development of the simple system whereby he avoided too vivid a view of local colour while he wandered on—aimlessly, as well as any one might judge—farther and farther downhill over the curve of the earth.

Now, it has been observed that a chap who starts downhill through the Archipelago commonly comes to an end of his journeying soon, and sometimes even sooner. The climate affords what you may call a ready accelerator, and so do the fever and the sun and the quality of the drink and other amusements prevailing in those parts. And often, if his steps stray a bit off the beaten track, he is likely to meet some kindly guide, black or brown or even white, perhaps, who bobs up in a quiet corner to point out a short cut. But though Merry took no heed of his steps in the least, and though he went quartering very far wide on that great thoroughfare which reaches from Singapore to Torres Strait along the midrib of the world, yet he

kept on going for quite a while : and the reasons therefor were curious and well worthy of note.

To begin with, he had brought along a fair constitution and a stomach that was not so much a stomach as a chemical retort—an advantage to be envied by kings. He carried a loose, limp, and rubbery frame well suited to the uses of a long-distance drunkard. He was by nature as mild and harmless a creature as ever tangled himself in a fool's quest. And finally he owned a gift, a certain special personal gift of the kind that tends universally to maintain a fixed percentage for the man alive over what he is worth when dead.

Such a provision is not so easily come by. Very able citizens have lacked it. Many an eminent explorer, many a devoted pioneer, has found his eminence and his devotion outbalanced in the primitive scale by the value of his trouser buttons. It is singular to reflect what potential marvels, what captains and leaders among men, have been knifed for the beers ; or elsewhere even broiled and eaten and complained of at dessert—some being tough and some lacking flavour.

Merry was none of these sorts, but he had an odd juggling knack of his fingers.

It was a sketchy enough knack at best. Heaven knew where he had acquired it, just as Heaven was left the responsibility of knowing most facts about Merry, anyhow. And certainly that was never discovered—no more nearly than his proper name, nor the meaning of the upright wrinkle between his brows like the dent of an axe, nor what conceivable things he had done or been or wanted that had landed him among the islands. Only there you were. Give the fellow a wisp of silk and some brass bracelets or mango

weeds, or such, and he would squat by the wayside or in the shade of a hut or the cabin flares of a native prau and work miracles.

He could make an egg to vanish and pluck it again from your left ear, and he could mould a kerchief between his big, soft hands until it produced a live lizard, which presently turned to a tame lorikeet, which sat up and dratted your eyes in good set Malay. He drew chinking coins out of space. He stood a plate on his nose and caught it on his calf, kept six rings accurately flying, grew flowers from a paper spill and butterflies from a kanari nut, and on occasion—if he was not absolutely petrified and could still see the mark—would even undertake to sink half a dozen daggers within the space of a hand print on the opposite wall: and would do it, too, with the utmost speed and precision.

Accomplishments of this kind were his passport, good any day for a lift, a lodging, or a load from the most unlikely people, for they set him apart in a cult of conjurers and jesters that has been privileged always, and everywhere.

And so, past all the usual landfalls and long past the tables of mortality for persons of his class and condition, he did keep going on. He kept on after his clothes had fallen to ruin and his face had turned the tint of seaweed; after he had lost most of the pretensions of a white man, his shoes and his shirt. And in due course he arrived at Zimballo's, where he lost the little property left to him, and the shreds of his pride, which every man has whether aware of it or not and which he loses last of all. . . .

Here again was an eastern city—not Palembang, though between two winks you scarce could tell it from

that or a dozen other ports: the same hive of mats and slats, of fishing poles and cigar-boxes, like a metropolis devised by ingenious small children; with the same smells which remain the only solid memorials; with the same swarm of pullulating humanity and the same crowding junks and praus, and now and then the far-venturing ships of recognised flags, sometimes as many as two or three at once; with the same yellows and browns and clays against shifting greens and eternal distant blues—all hazed with the same molten light.

But in its own ways the city is different and remarkable. It is a falling-off place. It is the eddy in a stream. At its roadstead the trickle of traffic turns back and sheers aside from a shallow sea of uncharted and unprofitable dangers: one of the big, blank spaces.

It has some scores of Europeans, who linger as official or accidental units in the population. It has some hundreds of Eurasians, who occur as improper fractions of varying hue. It has a season of the east monsoon when there is no longer any steaminess in the heat, nor any muddiness underfoot, nor any escape from pestilential wind and pervading dust: dust of the roads and dust of the seared rice fields, and crumbled refuse heaps and dust of a scorching hinterland; until a man's soul is changed in him, as you might say, to a portion of immortal thirst.

And also by necessary logic it has Zimballo's.

To this institution, one evening in the dry weather, came Mr. Merry, making what speed he could and clinging to the handrail all the way up from the landing while he caught his breath and stared painfully about.

Below the point he saw the harbour like a sheet of

crinkled copper. Overhead arched a coppery dome. To seaward he could gaze down a vista of rocky and deserted islets resembling slag heaps, where the sinking sun showed like a red-hot spot in the huge, coppered oven in which he found himself. He had been travelling since dawn ; he had been without liquor for something like twelve hours ; and as he resumed his struggle toward the clutter of tin-roofed sheds and arbours which marked his goal he achieved in his mind a dim but quite definite conviction—that hell could hold few surprises for him now, and earth none at all. . . .

But therein he erred.

" Where is the price ? " demanded Zimballo, and when Merry laid down a single piece of silver the international ruffian shook his crop head. " No go," he stated.

" It's all I have," said Merry.

" It ain' enough," decided Zimballo, eyeing him.

In fact, Mr. Merry made an odd figure of a customer. He wore a coolie's grass hat with a pointed crown. About his body hung an old duck jacket, so rotted with rust and mildew as to lend scant anchorage for one brass safety pin. His feet were graced with a pair of aboriginal sandals. It was true he still retained the essential garment, as the frayed ends above his ankles were there to prove. But for political reasons he had swathed himself mid-about with a striped Malay sarong, which is half a skirt and half a sash : whereat Zimballo took purpled offence.

This rogue, himself a mongrel grown fat in the slums of three continents, held starchy notions on the subject of pants.

" A drink," he said with intention, " will be half a

dollar. If you don' got it, get out. And if you *do* got it, pay quick and get out any'ow ! "

" I—I haven't it ; no. But for any sakes, man," gasped Merry between blackened lips, " you wouldn't turn a chap off ! I'm done and double-done. I been knocked out, with the sun and all. . . . See here now, Give me the worth o' that."

" I give you nothing. I don' like your looks. Why, even in my back rooms," puffed Zimballo, " the half-castes and orang sirani, they come here as *zaintlemen* only ! "

He loomed indignant under the glow of his fine oil lamps, just lighted against the dusk, in his fine main shed which it was the sentimental care of his life to run as close as might be on the model of a Levantine waterside dive.

There is a breed, or a type, whose destiny is to go about the world purveying garlic, cheap food, infamous wines, and more or less flea-infested hospitality in all manner of queer corners, by ice-bound bay or coral strand. So they did in the time of the Phœnicians. and so they still do, and that part is right enough. No one could have found fault with Zimballo's zinc bar, nor his highboy stacked to the ceiling with multi-coloured bottles, nor his tattered billiard table, nor his battered metal furniture. The flaring red cotton covers, the gilt mirrors, and the crude prints of obscure royalties ; the blue-glass siphons and the pinky lace curtains : these he had found some heroic means of transplanting, like the fixtures of a faith.

Meanwhile the East is the East and a good deal of a fixture itself, and behind his drawn jalousies and his masking vines Zimballo served the local devil quite successfully.

Not the red and lusty wickedness of other climes, but a languid sort, thriving in a reek of musk and raw Chinese apple blossom, of stale cooking and incense and stifled rooms and poisonous sweet champagne, as dreary as the click of fan-tan cash and the drag of silks and the voices of a cheeping bird-cage that circulated through the secret mazes of the establishment day and night. An unsmiling devil—in the flesh and on the spot very well represented, you would have said, by one of the billiard players, a tall, yellow, corpsy individual who had remarked the stir of Merry's arrival and who now lounged about the table.

"What's the row, Zimballo?" he drawled. "Let's have a share if there's any fun going. My word—is that a friend of yours?"

"No friend—Cap'n Silva, sir!" protested the hotel-keeper, rubbing his hands in a fluster. It annoyed him vehemently that he had not banished this disreputable stranger at sight. "'Ope to die, sir—I never see 'im bifore!"

Other guests had begun to gather at the promise of diversion: a bat-eared clerk from the Consulate office, a broken engineer, a benzoin trader looking professionally neat and antiseptic, and two or three loafers looking considerably less so—but all entire gentlemen, unpatched, and all expectant of Silva's lead and grateful for it.

"Well, well. A new specimen, then." The captain was pleased to assume a scientific interest as he propped himself on his cue and waved aside a wreath of cigarette smoke. "And a blasted poor specimen at that, I'd say. . . . Now which tribe would you take him to be, just as he stands?"

Captain Silva had a reputation of the kind invalu-

able to a humorist ; it assured him an audience. Also, he had that rare immunity in tropic heats which makes any man formidable, and even sinister. An Anglo-Portuguese strain was supposed to account for him —for his colour, for his superior air, and for various ventures of his not easy to define since piracy went out of date. Perhaps it did. But the gleam in his eye, a certain evil quickening with which he studied the unfortunate Merry, might have argued a darker origin.

" By God ! A specimen for true ! " he breathed, incredulous. " Zimballo," he added in his drawl, slow and acid, " you're getting infernally damned careless. Since when has this front room been free to any greasy lascar that comes along ? "

The fat man went a rich shade of magenta.

" I can' help if he shoves in on me ! 'Ow *can* I help ? "

" He wouldn't shove in by chance—on his nerve."

" Tha's it ! Tha's jus' what he done, sir. Nerve ! He comes after drink, and you know what he brings along with him—to buy off me ? Eh—what ? " Zimballo blew out his wrath. " Twenty-five Batavia cents ! . . . Besides a lid'l fool parrot to do juggle-trick work ! "

" Drinks ? Ah-ha. Likely enough too. . . . But how does he manage to call for 'em ? Can he talk anything human, at least ? "

And here, having confirmed his preception of the victim, Silva drove home the attack.

" Hey, you fella yonder. Bugis, Sula man, sea gypsy—whichever's your misbegotten stripe—suppose you speak'um. What pidgin belong you ? Where you hail from, anyway ? "

Mr. Merry stood there before them, dazed and help-

less. In one hand he held his rejected coin: in the other the lorikeet's cage and a few trifles wrapped with a kerchief. He knew what these people meant. He was not so far gone as to miss what mockery was being put upon him in savage contempt, and how it measured the distance he had travelled and the depth to which he had sunk. But his head was humming like a pressure gauge, and his body was banked with unslaked clinkers, and he made his effort as best he could.

"Friends," he said, swaying on his feet, "I don't —I don't mind if somebody kindly will set me up to a bracer. I'm passing through to Amboyna; dropped off a prau up the coast this morning. . . . It's true I do a bit with sleight o' hand to pay my way, but I had no luck this trip and I am asking . . . Brandy, arrack or saqueir, if you say so. It's—it's quite a while since I had any. I—I want it pretty bad."

In the silence Silva held up a finger.

"You," he noted softly, "are a dirty renegade!"

Above the line of swinging punkahs fanned the thick air with regular beat. It threw a constant flicker of shadow over the guests. Otherwise they showed no change of expression. They leaned against the tables and mopped their faces and drank and looked on. The way many men, not ingrained with cruelty to begin, have learned to look on at many curious things in regions where that particular devil does business.

"Pity," suggested the engineer after a time, emptying his glass deliberately—"a pity he can't pick a flask or two out that bloomin' hat he's wearin'. 'S big enough."

One of the loafers snickered.

"There's the river waiting for him. Full of drinks. And he could wash in it too."

"Turn him into those pigpens at the rear," advised the bat-eared clerk. "Let him try his games on the mixed lot inside, in the back rooms."

"No, sir, you won'!" Zimballo entered a gusty veto. "That sweep? He ain' fit for my back rooms neither!"

"You're right," said Silva. This yellow man did no mopping; his skin had the gloss of a salamander's and his eyes were like dusky jewels. A humorist in his own fashion he surely was—and his speech was tipped with malice as with acrid poison. "The blighter's not good enough for half-castes, even."

"What's the lowest vermin on earth? . . . Why, the white who's forgot his own race. It's hard enough at best—isn't it?—to keep yourself topside with your right authority among a few million saddle-coloured monkeys. But along comes a rascal like that and lives on the folk: acts like 'em; looks like 'em; *drinks* like 'em—by God! Then where's your sanguinary prestige gone?"

He knew how to stir these listless exiles.

"I tell you when a blasted tramp goes native altogether he needs to be taught what white men think of him, and where he belongs. He's a pest and a danger . . . I'd like to see him and every other like him wiped out of the islands. It's a common duty to suppress the whole filthy crew of 'em!"

They caught some of his energy—some of his superior biting viciousness as well. Especially the loafers were roused by a call to higher things. The benzoin merchant, betraying a habit acquired in a ruder

society, groped vaguely at his hip. The engineer sought a billiard cue that balanced better to his fancy. Only the little clerk retained official scruples and timidly doubted if there was any order against juggling, as such.

"There's an order against vagrants," countered Silva.

"But, after all, if he has a trade of his own——"

"Trade be damned! He comes begging—doesn't he? And if you want to bet he's not a fraud besides——"

"We might give him a chance."

"It's what I mean!" cried Silva. "We'll give him a chance, for true. . . . Look here——"

He turned on the bewildered Merry.

"Look here—you! You say you've had no luck? Well: pray for it now. You say sleight o' hand is your line? Well: turn out a sample—if you can: something to prove you're not just a thieving beggar. . . . Observe? Here is a dollar. I lay it down to your silver bit, and I lay you the odds you've no trick worth a rotten straw—not one but I'll catch you out and show you up. If you win, you get your drinks. If you lose——! . . . I'm telling you! Be careful!"

Mr. Merry's first care, however, was to be seated. That is to say, he put himself into a chair at an iron-topped table because it happened to be nearer than the floor.

He understood. With some reserve of tortured clear vision he did understand—the subtle finish to Silva's jape: playing his poor claims against his frantic need—the last refinement of humiliation; to make him ex-

hibit his pitiful arts as a faker and a trickster of brown natives before men of his own kind. They hitched closer about him. They were highly entertained, languid, avid, and vindictive ; and they watched him with fish eyes from faces like wet leather bags, flabby and pithless. He saw them through the blue smoke and the heat and the lamplight, and he saw that in fact they were his own kind. He had fallen rather lower, that was all and they had dallied with the local devil rather more cautiously—they could still pay for their drinks. But if he meant to share with them he would have to grovel. There was no help, and no escape. None. For just then, with diabolic inspiration, Silva poured a glass of sticky yellow liquor and put it out of his reach where the drifting scent of it was a torment of Tantalus. . . .

So he did what he had to do : untied his kerchief and the lorikeet's little cage and spread out his few cheap odds and ends of juggler's stuff—to try as you might say with the quickness of his hand to deceive the eye of his fate.

In his usual programme he counted one bit of conjuring which had earned him many a step and many a tot of country spirits along his journey, and which reasonably he could trust. He used on occasion to take up three small beans, red and blue and black, and to take the lorikeet on the same thumb ; and with magic byplay he made to feed the bird three beans and three and three again and so on, while the fluffy green mite still plucked them from his finger tips and chattered in a manner absurdly impudent and human. . . . It was an easy illusion. It had worked scores of times. It began to work this time, startling the watchers with its quick and graceful turn—even these. It ran on.

It was winning. It might have won him through : but the room and the lights were spinning about the luckless magician like parts in a gigantic Catherine wheel —he sagged forward on the table, his nimble fingers faltered—slipped ; and quick as a striking snake, Silva gripped him.

" Ah-ha ! What did I say ? Even at his own game—this liar—this dirty tramp ! "

The nature of the man loosed itself in a sudden, an insensate spurt of fury, the complement of its accustomed dark restraint. He swept the poor rubbish from the table. He snatched up the lorikeet and flung it down and as the tiny thing flapped and screamed, broken-winged, stamped it underfoot. He whirled Merry around by the elbows, so that all should have an equal shot at him with fists or toe or billiard cue.

" This outcaste ! " he cried joyously. " What are we going to do with him ? "

" Throw him out ! " came the chorus. " Throw him out ! " . . .

Of the next succeeding interval in Mr. Merry's pilgrimage, and his particular progress that night, some slight record afterwards survived for a while. Not officially, of course. The witnesses were certain nameless and unnameable residents of Zimballo's whose presence in the colonial court would hardly have looked well, and throughout the subsequent perfunctory inquiry they were very justly held to be incompetent, irrelevant, and improper persons, and they were never questioned—in fact, their existence was even denied. But they knew something of Merry.

They knew how he was hunted all about that rabbit warren, in and out, by passages and traps and holes in

the wall, upstairs and down. They knew how he sought refuge through filth and dust and blows with the blind cunning of a harried and flank-torn cur. How he got away at some turn. How he dragged himself to some innermost recess of the place before he collapsed. How he was found there at last, and how he found himself, in a sense—though exactly why or by what dispensation these matters came to pass, naturally the said witness never had any very clear idea.

They had few ideas about anything, beyond their daily plaint against God, man, the cook, and the weather—which was undeniably an ample source at that, you may say. They kept the story only as long as it was new, like a scrap of ribbon, or a painted bangle or any other trifle which circulates in common currency, soon to become faded, lost, and forgotten. But while it lasted their tale was precise enough, and it certainly established beyond doubt that the girl with the pink wristbands was the first thing Merry saw when he opened his eyes again, when he filtered back toward consciousness with his head on her knee and her quick, cool hands nursing him.

"More!" was Mr. Merry's greeting.

She sat down the empty cup.

"We got no more," she said.

To him she must have seemed, she could have seemed at first only a figment of dreams. She crouched by the pallet to which she had dragged him. The room was darkened; a candle struggled fitfully somewhere with the rays of moonshine that came by the wide window. The light just sufficed to show her small pinched face, of a deathly pallidity under its coil of heavy, dead hair, and her thin arms and figure loosely covered by her loose-sleeved wrapper. It sufficed for

him to recognize her, as men, without start or surprise, absolutely and infallibly do recognize and collogue with the creatures of their delirium.

"I have been looking for you," he said simply.

"You've been a long time about it," she answered, with the same simplicity. . . .

In truth, life and all issues had been pretty well simplified and fused down for both these people : for Merry, who was as nearly as possible incandescent, and for the woman, who was merely burned out.

"I looked everywhere," he affirmed, in childlike earnestness. "I looked at Samarang. I looked at Batavia. I looked at Palembang. That's a mean sort of place, don't you think ? . . . Did you go to Palembang ? "

"No," said the girl with the pink wristbands.

"I don't see how I missed you."

"You missed me, all right. You missed me at the start—at Singapore. That was the time to find me."

He drew his breath as if in his sleep she had prodded some old wound, and the dent between his brows deepened.

"I did look for you at Singapore."

"You looked too late," said the girl with the pink wristbands.

"I went to the Jalan Sultan," he pleaded. "You lived in a house in the Jalan Sultan, at Singapore. It was there I met you. . . . But when I went back to fetch you—you were gone ! "

"Yes," she said dully. "I was gone. . . . They heard you promise to take me away. The captain—he said you wouldn't come back. He said you wouldn't

dare—too likely to get your throat cut if you tried it. He said his people had scared you good. And you didn't come back that night."

"No." His stare was fixed and waking. "No. I didn't come back that night."

"The captain said you were scared. I didn't know. But I sat up waiting like we had planned—you and me. I was waiting and waiting. And you didn't come. Why—" Her flat voice slipped a note. "Why—why—why didn't you come that night? *Were* you scared?"

"I was drunk," he said. "God forgive me!"

Such tones a man may use when his naked soul is hauled out of him and stood up for judgment.

"It doesn't matter." She sank back again. "I wanted to get away then. . . . Afterwards I didn't care."

The drink was taking hold of him, bracing him each instant nearer to an actual comprehension.

"Why didn't you care?" he demanded.

She pulled back the pink silk bands from her wrist and held them before him.

"That's one reason."

The man drew himself convulsively to his knees.

"Who did it? Who did that?"

"Silva. The captain—don't you know?"

"Silva?"

"They call him Captain Silva. He isn't really. He's a half-caste himself, only he pretends—and he scares everybody so. It was him brought me here. He's going to sell me to Zimballo."

"Zimballo!"

She nodded. "I suppose he'll sell me. I'm not worth much as a niña de salon, but I'm pretty tough.

I've lasted—you see. . . . And—he says it's all I'm fit for."

Mr. Merry made never a sound.

For finally, with his wondering ended and with all questions of human chemistry and racial difference aside—finally this white man had reached the stage which had been so fully defined for him one steamy hot day by a Dutch navigator at Palembang. He had gambled away his last cent. He had been reduced to a wreck. His woman, in the laconic phrase—" his woman had gone bad on him." He had no more use for anything he could lay to mind. He was decidedly sorry with the world. And he was utterly ready to die with a big smash. . . .

So Mr. Merry went amok, in the exact meaning of that word.

They were aware of him the moment he entered the main shed. They saw him, and they started at him with a yell.

He was the same man they had chased and worried—that helpless and harmless outcaste—just before. But so it is with all such outcastes: always helpless and harmless—just before. Heaven had fashioned Mr. Merry in one image, but the climatic devil had finished him in quite another. Most of his few rags had been torn from him, he was swathed about the middle with a Malay sarong, and his lean body was scored and pulped with blows. But his face was mottled and bluish now, with a fleck of foam in his beard. And when he came in among them he neither paused nor turned aside.

He made one jump to Zimballo's zinc bar. He made one leap to the highboy, Zimballo's high altar.

He swept into his arms half a dozen of multicoloured bottles, and, looming there above them from the top of the bar—up among the lights and the swaying punkahs—he began to launch those juggling-missiles right and left, with the utmost speed and precision. . . .

The first one caught Zimballo full in the chest and knocked him back against the wall with the shock of a battering ram. Another crashed just over his head as he sank to the floor. The engineer was sprawling at the billiard table when a third exploded like a shell fairly in front and deluged him in a flood of sticky liquor. The loafers and the clerk turned to run. But Merry dealt with them—and with retribution.

He was doing the thing he best knew how to do, by virtue of the odd knack of his fingers—and this time he made no mistakes.

He emptied a shelf, and the next, and the bottles still flew from him, streaking through space, smashing among the enemy.

Most of them made a miserable escape one way or another and fled, carrying a voice of panic that cleared out the establishment from end to end front and rear. But not Silva. Not the yellow-faced captain, who came from the back of the room and charged with uplifted cue, snarling—who was met half-way: stopped overwhelmed and crushed in his tracks as by a hail of thunderbolts. . . .

When Mr. Merry led the girl out they had to cling for a time to each other and to the handrail that led down toward the landing.

All about them were the walls of the night, the dark, blank walls of land and sky and their prison. But outward lay a great silvered streak. To seaward they

could gaze down a dim vista of rocky and deserted islets where the moon showed like an open silver gateway, like a wide, bright door to the uncharted spaces beyond—far beyond, as Merry's gesture showed her.

Of that consummation a whisper was caught, it seems, through the masking vines overhead: a last glimpse of them as they reeled there together on the brink.

"And you wasn't—you wasn't scared this time!" she gasped. "You ain't—you ain't scared now?"

"No," he said. "That is where we are going—out yonder. . . . I've a little prau canoe down here at the steps—if we can reach it. . . . It's where we belong, and our one chance. Over the curve of the earth—among the islands of the shallow sea. Where no one ever does go and nobody can follow."

"There's nothing much to eat. Nor drink, neither," she added quite practically. "We will die."

"What does that matter? . . . But a native might pull through, in the native way. And if it might happen to a native, it might happen to us. . . Come!"

They went.

THE END

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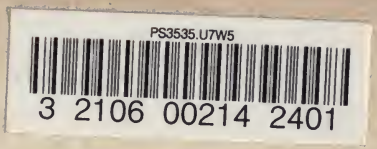
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